

US World War II Parachute Infantry Regiments



GORDON L. ROTTMAN

ILLUSTRATED BY MARK STACEY

ELITE • 198

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WORLD WAR II US PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENTS

INTRODUCTION

The idea of parachute troops had been toyed with since World War I, but it was not until the 1930s that some countries undertook more ambitious trials and actually raised parachute units. The Soviet Union began forming units in 1931, followed by Germany and France in 1937, and Italy the following year. Britain

Classic study of a paratrooper, apparently of either 507th or 513th PIR, equipped for the Rhine operation in March 1945. He wears the new T-7 parachute harness with a single-point quick-release buckle centered on the chest, replacing the T-5 harness that required three snap hooks to be unfastened in order to remove it on the DZ. Modeled on that of the British Irvin harness, the quick release was operated by pulling out a safety clip, rotating the plate 90 degrees, and slapping it with the palm of the hand. The reserve parachute was still attached below the quick-release by two snap hooks, however. This man has an M3 knife strapped to his right ankle, and demolition bags hanging at his thighs (see Plate F). The Griswold container on his right side has the extension added by 17th Abn Div riggers, to enable an M1 Garand rifle to be carried fully assembled. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)



waited until World War II had begun before raising its first units in 1940. Deployment concepts ranged from using paratroopers as small raiding detachments, to large strike units spearheading ground forces.

The spring 1940 invasions of Norway and the Low Countries, where Germany employed paratroopers, glider troops, and air-landed troops, encouraged other armies to expand their efforts urgently. The US Army began seriously examining the concept of paratroopers and glider troops, but from the American perspective they were largely viewed as raiding forces that would operate in no larger units than battalions. Temporary task forces could be formed if larger units were necessary, but the idea of permanent regiments, much less divisions, was seldom discussed.

On July 1, 1940 the 48-man Parachute Test Platoon was formed at Ft Benning, Georgia, to test training methods, equipment, and jump techniques. This was deemed successful, and the 1st Parachute Battalion was activated on September 16, being redesignated 501st Parachute Battalion on October 1; this was followed by the 502nd Prcht Bn on July 1, 1941. The Provisional Parachute Group was formed on February 25, 1941 – not as a tactical unit, but to provide cadres for new units, develop training literature, study unit organization, and develop tactics and procedures. There were difficulties in obtaining sufficient qualified manpower, shortages of parachutes and aircraft, and insufficient training facilities.

The 503rd and 504th Prcht Inf Bns were activated August 22 and October 5, 1941, respectively. Following the successful German airborne invasion of Crete in May 1941 it was decided that there needed to be a higher tactical command echelon for the parachute battalions. The “group” concept allowed a varied number of battalions to be attached and tailored for missions, but it was decided that the “regiment” was more effectual: the term was familiar to infantrymen, was compatible with standard infantry tactics, and ensured that a regiment would be activated for every three parachute battalions.

As the battalions completed their training they were transferred to GHQ control. On March 21, 1942 the Provisional Parachute Group was expanded into the Airborne Command, tasked with raising new units, overseeing training, coordinating airlift, and developing doctrine and techniques. It was moved to Ft Bragg, North Carolina, while the four-week jump school remained at Ft Benning. In April 1943 the Abn Cmd relocated to the new Camp Mackall near Ft Bragg, and on March 1, 1944 it was redesignated the Airborne Center.

There was still argument over the need to field airborne divisions as the Germans, British, and Soviets were doing. Opponents of the division proposed temporary task forces, with a mix of parachute and glider regiments and attached support units. Proponents argued for a division with three



A paratrooper on the way to Germany entertains his “stick” (paraload of paratroopers) with a harmonica. The small flap on the front of his T-5 reserve parachute allowed inspection of the locking-wire and pins, which passed from the red ripcord handle at the right of the pack and through two pierced cones to secure the pack closed. If his main canopy deployed only partially, thus slowing his descent, he might have time to place his left arm across the front of the reserve, pull the handle with his right hand, and drop it. With the pins removed from the cones, the pale-colored elastic cords would pull open the pack’s covering panels; the jumper then had to pull out the folded 22ft white canopy, throw it outwards, and shake the suspension lines to inflate it fully. Given the low altitudes from which combat jumps were made, success was far from certain, and the deploying reserve might get tangled inside the partly deployed main canopy. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

Platoon leaders of the 503rd PIR conferring during training in New Guinea between October 1943 and February 1944. In the lush Pacific jungles helmet camouflage nets would have been practical, but they were seldom used. The officer at left has a slung M1928A1 Thompson SMG. It is often assumed that older weapons were replaced on a one-for-one basis when newer ones arrived; in fact, units often retained what they had and used both old and new side by side. The officer to the right has an M1936 musette bag, M17 binoculars case, and 18in M1942 machete. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)



parachute regiments and an organic air transport group. The first two airborne divisions were finally approved in July 1942, the 82nd and 101st Abn Divs being activated by splitting the former.

On February 24, 1941, 1st Bn, 501st Prcht Inf Regt was activated, though the complete regiment was not activated for almost two years. Before this happened the 1st Bn was inactivated on November 2, 1942 in Australia, and its assets were used to organize a new 2nd Bn, 503rd PIR (the original 2/503rd PIR had been sent to Britain). The 501st PIR itself was finally activated on November 15, 1942 at Camp Toccoa, GA, along with a new 1st Battalion.

The first two complete PIRs were activated on March 2, 1942: the 502nd from the 502nd Prcht Bn, and the 503rd PIR from the 503rd and 504th PIBs. Those battalions had been redesignated on February 24, 1942 prior to the regiments' activation. Through 1942 eight complete regiments were activated, and six more during 1943; a single PIR was formed in 1945 by converting a Glider Infantry Regiment.

This book provides capsule histories of the PIRs, and the color plates display virtually all of their uniforms, field equipment, weapons, and insignia, concentrating on items unique to the paratroopers. As the capsule histories show, many of the parachute infantry regiments were among the most decorated units in the US Army, seeing action in all theaters of operations.

Mediterranean Theater parachute operations

Location	Date	Unit(s)	Mission
Tafraoui, Algeria	Nov 8, 1942	2/503rd PIR (-)	Secure airfield
Youks-les-Bains, Algeria	Nov 15	2/503rd PIR (-)	Secure airfield
El Djen, Tunisia	Dec 24	Prov plat 2/503rd PIR	Destroy bridge
Gela, Sicily	July 9, 1943	505th PIR, 3/504th PIR	Support amphibious assault
Gela, Sicily	July 10	504th PIR (-)	Support amphibious assault
Salerno, Italy	Sept 13	504th PIR (-)	Reinforcement
Salerno, Italy	Sept 14	505th PIR	Reinforcement
Avellino, Italy	Sept 14	2/509th PIR	Divisionary raid
Le Muy, S. France	Aug 15, 1944	517th PIR, 509th PIB, 1/551st PIR	Support amphibious assault

European Theater parachute operations			
Location	Date	Units	Mission
St Martin de Varreville & Pouppeville, France	June 5/6, 1944	501st, 502nd & 506th PIR	Support amphibious assault
Ste Mère Eglise & Carentan, France	June 5/6	505th, 507th & 508th PIR	Support amphibious assault
Grave & Nijmegen, Netherlands	Sept 17	504th, 505th & 508th PIR	Support offensive
Eindhoven, Netherlands	Sept 17	501st, 502nd & 506th PIR	Support offensive
Wesel, Germany	March 24, 1945	507th & 513th PIR	Support offensive & river crossing

Southwest Pacific Theater parachute operations			
Location	Date	Unit(s)	Mission
Nadzab, New Guinea	Sept 5, 1943	503rd PIR	Seize airfield, block enemy withdrawal
Noemfoor Island	July 3–4, 1944	503rd PIR (-)	Reinforcement
Manarawat, Leyte	Nov 27–Dec 3	detachments	Establish base ⁽¹⁾
Manarawat	Dec 4	A/457th PFAB	Position artillery
Tagaytay Ridge, Luzon	Feb 3, 1945	511th PIR	Seize dominating terrain
Tagaytay Ridge	Feb 4	457th PFAB	Deliver artillery & support
Corregidor Island	Feb 16	503rd PIR (-)	Seize island
Los Baños, Luzon	Feb 23	B/1/511th PIR (+)	Liberate internees
Dutch New Guinea	May 18–20, 1945	Team/1st Recon Bn	Rescue crash survivors ⁽²⁾
Camalaniugan, Luzon	June 23	1/511th PIR (+)	Block enemy withdrawal

Notes:

(1) Elements of division HQ, signalmen and medics, a rifle platoon, the Reconnaissance Platoon, etc. were individually parachuted in to establish the division forward CP.

(2) This non-combat operation was conducted by a scratch team of Filipinos of the Parachute Section, 1st Recon Bn, Special, to rescue three survivors of a C-47 transport crash. Once the survivors' injuries allowed it, they and 11 rescuers were extracted in three CG-4A gliders on July 2.

Armed with an M1A1 folding-butt carbine, a soldier of the 101st Abn Div's Special Troops (white square assembly marker on helmet sides) hands out C-rations to grateful French civilians. A C-ration case was packed with 24 each "meat units" and "bread units," one can of each constituting a meal. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

THE AIRBORNE DIVISIONS

Organization

The Army activated five airborne divisions: the 82nd and 101st on August 15, 1942 at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana; the 11th on February 25, 1943 at Camp Mackall, NC; the 17th on April 15, 1943 also at Camp Mackall; and the 13th on August 13, 1943 at Ft Bragg, Georgia. A 15th Abn Div with the 545th PIR was planned, but never activated.

The assigned parachute regiments had usually been activated at an earlier date and a different location. Since the regiments were at least partly trained and had been separate units, they sometimes had difficulty integrating into their parent division, to whose non-jumping elements they considered themselves superior. On paper a division had one parachute and two glider infantry regiments, the opposite of the British model;





Shoulder patch of 82nd Airborne Division, "All Americans."

this mistake was soon recognized, and one or two additional parachute regiments were attached (however, the 82nd began life with two PIRs and one GIR). There were 14 fully formed PIRs even though there were only five divisions. There were also three regiments of which only one battalion was activated, these subsequently serving as separate battalions.

The early PIRs were raised from existing separate battalions, which were split to provide the cadres for the new battalions, and newly qualified paratroopers were assigned from the jump school. In other instances cadres came from earlier-raised PIRs. Yet other regiments were formed entirely from untrained troops augmented by some cadres from non-parachute units. They would undertake basic and specialty training together, and then attend jump school, one battalion at a time.

The selection of parachute regimental commanders was meticulous. Preference was given to officers who had been in the parachute troops since the earliest days, and most had been parachute battalion commanders and/or had served on regimental and battalion staffs. No regimental commanders were brought into the airborne fold who had not served in such positions. Few if any battalion commanders were brought in from non-parachute units, not even from glider regiments within the same division – the parachute fraternity was that well entrenched.

Most infantry regiments relied on post medical units for support in training, and were assigned medical detachments only when alerted for overseas deployment. However, medical detachments were assigned to PIRs during training, since they too had to be toughened up and parachute-qualified.

A

2nd BATTALION, 509th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT; UK & MOROCCO, 1942–43

Deployed to Britain in June 1942 as the 2/503rd PIR, this unit was redesignated 2/509th PIR on November 2, 1942. In Britain the battalion became a showcase unit, frequently being visited by VIPs. The same held true while it was operating the Fifth Army Airborne Training Center at Oujda, French Morocco, where it trained its own replacements, provided ground tactical training to glider pilots, and trained other units in airlift and aircraft loading.

The 1942 "parachute jumper coat and trousers" provided paratroopers with a distinctive and functional uniform. While well designed, however, it proved to be hot owing to its tight weave, while still being insufficient for cold weather, and its light tan color was too conspicuous in European forests and tropical jungles. It was not uncommon to paint on green bands or splotches; this was not necessarily a unit-wide practice, but was left to individuals.

(1) The M1 steel helmet worn by this private first class is camouflage-painted (a common practice in the unit). He has unlined horsehide riding gloves, and a rigger-made four-pocket chest pouch for M9A1 antitank rifle grenades, in addition to his standard web equipment. This comprises the M1936 pistol belt, suspenders, and musette bag worn as a pack. While not all are visible here, on the belt are an M1910 metal-cap canteen in its carrier behind his right hip; M1916 holster for the M1911A1 pistol; two "Air Corps" rifle clip holders; M1924 first aid pouch; M1918 pistol magazine pouch; 33ft lowering rope, and M1905 bayonet in M3 scabbard. He is

armed with an M1903 bolt-action rifle with an M1 grenade-launcher on the muzzle (the M7 launcher for the M1 Garand rifle became available only in late 1943). Other items are stuffed into his pockets.

(2) This rifleman, armed with an M1 Garand, has camouflaged his clothing and attached a British camouflage net to his helmet. This view shows the M1936 field or "musette" bag, also streaked with paint, attached to his suspenders; note the soldier's name stenciled on the flap in black below the "U.S." This angle shows the "Air Corps" pouches beside his canteen.

(3) The battalion's "pocket patch," depicting a jumper (known as the "Gingerbread Man") standing in the door, was worn on the breast of officers' leather flight jackets.

(4) The Fifth Army left shoulder-sleeve insignia was worn in Morocco, sometimes with an added white-on-black felt "Parachute" tab.

(5) This small "Gingerbread Man" was later painted on the sides of the helmet.

(6) M9A1 high explosive AT rifle grenade, in original yellow finish; from 1943 they were painted olive drab.

(7) Mk II fragmentation grenade, also issued painted yellow until early 1943.

(8) The "Air Corps pouch" rifle clip holder held five 8-round M1 clips or seven 5-round M1903 clips.

(9) The M1924 first aid pouch held a small Carlisle field dressing in a tear-open copper can. If the can was painted red, rather than the standard OD, it held a packet of antibiotic sulfa powder. The introduction of a waxed cardboard packet in place of the can required the slightly enlarged M1942 pouch, otherwise identical.



During a training exercise, paratroopers of a parachute field artillery battalion manhandle a 75mm M1A1 pack howitzer on an M8 carriage designed for airborne use; as usual for this task, they have stacked ammo tubes on top of the trail. The "75 pack" was broken down into nine airdrop loads each under a 24ft G-1 cargo parachute. At left is part of the M4 "paracrate" for the cradle and top sleigh, and above it is the M1 paracrate for the front trail. (Tom Laemlein/*Armor Plate Press*)

A parachute field artillery battalion (PFAB) was typically partnered with the PIR, though there were instances of GFABs being placed in direct support of PIRs during ground combat. Both PFABs and GFABs were under the division artillery, and supported whatever units needed them. In early 1945 one of the glider infantry regiments was deleted, and one of the attached parachute regiments was assigned to the division to give it two. Any other attached regiments usually remained in that status. A second PFAB was added, and a second engineer company was converted to parachute. This was accompanied by a "plus-up" of all other divisional units to make the division more effective in prolonged ground combat.

It should be noted that other than the PIR, PFAB, one company of the engineer battalion, the parachute maintenance company, reconnaissance platoon, and a few specialist individuals in other units, no other troops of the airborne division were parachute-qualified. All other units were trained to be delivered by glider or other air transport.¹

Mention must be made of the 11 Glider Infantry Regiments that served alongside the PIRs. These consisted of only two battalions each with three companies. The companies had a weapons platoon and only two rifle platoons, but each with three rifle squads and a mortar squad in the HQ. Under the 1945 reorganization one GIR was removed; the remaining glider regiment received a third battalion, and the rifle companies third rifle platoons. The division retained its two glider field artillery battalions.

A point of contention between the flamboyant paratroopers and the non-volunteer "glider-riders" was that the latter received no hazardous duty pay or special insignia other than a glider cap patch, nor could they wear jump boots. They finally received "glider wings" on March 14, 1944, and hazardous duty pay on June 4, but they received only half that of paratroopers – \$25 for enlisted and \$50 for officers. Only five of the 11 GIRs actually conducted glider assaults, though two of them twice.

1 See forthcoming *Elite 200, World War II Glider Assault Tactics*

Deployment

Parachute regiments and their accompanying units were costly to equip, train and prepare for combat, and were extremely valuable specialized assets. They required highly motivated, physically fit troops, many of whom could have been NCOs or junior officers in other units. Given the time and effort spent on parachute regiments, they could not be wasted away in prolonged ground combat once their airborne mission had been completed. The doctrine held that parachute troops should be relieved and withdrawn to their base as soon as practical after the arrival of supporting ground forces.

Apart from the wastefulness of employing them in circumstances for which “leg” infantry were equally or even better suited, in order to maintain the operational tempo in the theater of operations it was essential to return airborne units to their bases to receive replacements, re-equip, train, and otherwise prepare for the next operation. Turnaround time had to be minimal, and keeping airborne troops in the front line after conventional units could have relieved them only extended that turnaround time. There was no official timeframe for relief after they accomplished their original airborne mission, but 10–20 days was a goal. During the December 1944 German Ardennes offensive three airborne divisions plus various separate units were committed to a prolonged period of ground combat out of necessity; losses were significant, and two battalions (509th and 1/551st) were virtually annihilated. This campaign almost destroyed the American airborne capability in Europe, and it would not be until early spring of 1945 that it had been rebuilt to the extent that the Rhine operation of late March was feasible.

The division's antiaircraft artillery battalion in fact comprised three batteries each of AA and AT weapons. Here a jeep tows a British Mk IV 6-pdr AT gun into position in Germany. The airborne AT batteries each had eight of these, which took the same ammo as the US 57mm M1 gun; the Mk III airborne carriage had a narrow wheelbase, folding trails and smaller shield that allowed it to fit into a glider, which the 57mm did not. Kneeling in the left foreground is a wireman; his DR-8 hand reel carries a quarter-mile of field telephone wire. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)





Shoulder patch of 101st Airborne Division, "Screaming Eagles."



Shoulder patch of 11th Airborne Division, "The Angels."



Shoulder patch of 17th Airborne Division, "Golden Talon."

Basic airborne division, 1942–44, T/O 71

Division establishment	8,505 ⁽³⁾
HQ & HQ Company, Airborne Division	200
Parachute Infantry Regiment ⁽¹⁾	2,029
HQ & HQ Company & Band ⁽²⁾	162
Parachute Infantry Battalion (x3)	530
Service Company	208
Medical Detachment	69
Glider Infantry Regiment (x2)	1,678
HQ & HQ Company	236
Glider Infantry Battalion (x2)	643
Service Company	85
Medical Detachment	71
Airborne Engineer Battalion	436
Airborne Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion	505
Airborne Division Artillery	1,474
HQ & HQ Battery & Band ⁽²⁾	125
Parachute Field Artillery Battalion	573
Glider Field Artillery Battalion (x2)	384
Medical Detachment	8
Special Troops	
Airborne Medical Company	215
Airborne Signal Company	85
Airborne Ordnance Maintenance Company	77
Provisional Parachute Maintenance Company ⁽³⁾	
Military Police Platoon	38
Provisional Reconnaissance Platoon ⁽³⁾	40–60
Counterintelligence Corps Detachment	6

Notes:

(1) 1–3 additional PIRs might be assigned/attached.

(2) In 1943 the two bands, if activated, were consolidated into a divisional band.

(3) Division strength depended on the number of assigned/attached PIRs and PFABs.

From March 1945 there were 2x PIRs, one GIR (now x3 battalions), and 2x PFABs. One GFAB was armed with 105mm pack howitzers and the other retained 75mm pack howitzers. The parachute maintenance company and reconnaissance platoon were no longer provisional.

Tracking the divisions

In order to follow the course of action, this brief summary is provided of the movements of the five airborne divisions and the near division-sized First Airborne Task Force.

The 82nd Abn Div arrived in Morocco in May 1943; air-assaulted into Sicily on July 9–10 (504th, 505th PIR); moved to Tunisia in August, and back to Sicily in September. It air-assaulted into Italy on September 13–14 (504th, 505th PIR); departed Italy (leaving the 504th behind) for Tunisia in November, and arrived in Northern Ireland in December. Moved to England in February 1944, it air-assaulted into Normandy on June 6 (505th, 507th, 508th PIR), returning to Britain in July. It air-assaulted into the Netherlands on September 17 (504th, 505th, 508th PIR). Moved to France in November, it entered Belgium in December and Germany in January 1945. Moved to France in February, then to Germany in April, it returned to the US in January 1946.

The 101st Abn Div arrived in Britain in September 1943, and air-assaulted into Normandy on June 6, 1944 (501st, 502nd, 506th PIR), returning to Britain in July. It air-assaulted into the Netherlands on September 17 (501st,



502nd, 506th PIR). Moved to France in November and Belgium in December, it then entered Germany in April 1945. It was inactivated in France on November 30, 1945.

The **11th Abn Div** arrived in New Guinea in May 1944. Deployed to Leyte in November and then to Luzon, it conducted air assaults on February 3, 1945 (511th PIR) and June 23 (1/511th PIR). Deployed to Okinawa in August, and then to Japan, it returned to the US in 1949.

The **First Abn Task Force** was formed in Italy in July 1944, and air-assaulted into southern France on August 15 (517th PIR, 1/551st PIR, 509th PIB; plus British 2nd Prcht Bde – 4th, 5th & 7th Bns Prcht Regt). Disbanded in February 1945.

The **17th Abn Div** arrived in Britain in August 1944 and in France that December. Moved to Belgium in December, and back to France in February

Paratroopers help a wounded comrade to an aid station in Germany. Walking wounded – “limpers” – made their own way to the aid station rather than waiting for litter-bearers; they were treated as soon as possible by the company aidmen, before their condition worsened and shock set in. From August 1944 the ten-pocket M1923 rifle cartridge belt had been replaced in the PIRs with the M1936 pistol belt as general issue, with two-pocket pouches that accommodated either two 8-rd rifle clips or two 15-rd carbine magazines (see Plate G). These are identifiable by their bottom eyelets, to which these soldiers have hooked their M1942 first aid pouches. The new belt arrangement made it easier to position the web gear when donning parachute harness. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)



Men of the 503rd PIR 'chute-up for the Corregidor jump on February 16, 1945. The unit had not jumped in seven and a half months, and in the meantime they had seen a great deal of ground combat; no doubt their web gear needed to be reconfigured to fit under parachute harness. At left, note a stack of brand new B-4 life vests. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

1945, it air-assaulted into Germany on March 24 (507th, 513th PIR). It returned to the US in September 1945, and was inactivated.

The **13th Abn Div** arrived in Britain and then France in February 1945. It returned to the US in August without seeing combat, and was inactivated in February 1946.

In August 1944 all US airborne units in Europe were assigned to **XVIII Abn Corps**, which along with British I Abn Corps (1st & 6th Abn Divs, 52nd Div (Air Transportable), 1st Polish Independent Parachute Bde Grp) was under the **1st Allied Abn Army** until May 20, 1945.

It was originally planned for both the 13th and 17th Abn Divs to be returned to the States after VE-Day, converted to standard infantry divisions, and committed to the invasion of Japan.

EVOLUTION OF THE PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT

Organization

The original 1940–42 parachute battalions were envisioned as being assigned to field armies and employed as raiders. When absorbed into parachute regiments in early 1942 they took on a role similar to standard infantry. While smaller in numbers, lighter armed, and possessing less logistical support than standard infantry regiments, they had the same basic organizational elements. The regiments went through three wartime organizational iterations.

Regardless of the specific Table of Organization, the PIR had the same basic structure: a regimental headquarters and headquarters company, service company, and medical detachment; and 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions. Battalions had an HHC and three rifle companies (1st Bn, Cos A–C; 2nd Bn, Cos D–F; 3rd Bn, Cos G–I).

Troopers from 101st Abn Div move into the line at Bastogne, December 1944. Companies often formed three or four two-man bazooka teams; here three men can be seen to carry the 2.36in M9 bazooka, the breakdown model first produced at the request of the Airborne Command. The man at the right carries two bazooka rockets tucked under his M1936 suspenders, a common practice. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)





The 17th Abn Div was issued a small number of 57mm T15E9 recoilless rifles just before the March 1945 Rhine assault. Three were authorized per company, but it is not believed that they received that many. This 40lb weapon could be fired from the shoulder, from a bipod and monopod on the ground, or from an M1917A1 machine-gun tripod. It was provided with both HE and HE antitank rounds, but was found to be ineffective against tanks. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

A major difference between parachute and standard infantry platoons was that the paratrooper platoon had only two rifle squads and a mortar squad, instead of three rifle squads. In 1943–44 many regiments adopted three rifle squads using over-strength personnel, while retaining the mortar squad. In the final December 1944 T/O the three squads were formalized.

Some PIRs (503rd, 504th, 517th) at one time or another operated as parachute regimental combat teams (PRCT), with an assigned parachute field artillery battalion (PFAB) and a parachute engineer company. The 573-man PFAB was composed of a headquarters and service battery, three howitzer batteries each with four 75mm M1A1 pack howitzers, and an AA and AT battery with eight .50cal machine guns and four 37mm M3A1 antitank guns. The latter were subsequently replaced with British 6-pdr Mk IV guns on the Mk III airborne carriage. Sometimes an AT battery (8 x 6-pdrs) and/or an AA battery (12 x .50cal MGs) were attached to a PRCT from the divisional airborne AA battalion, which possessed three of each type of battery. The 145-man engineer company had three platoons.

Weapons

Most weapons employed by paratroopers were no different from those used by other infantrymen, but were allocated differently – and often not according to T/Os. For instance, M1 rifles were often substituted for M1 carbines, which were really suited only to short-range self-defense.

Initially each squad had an M1903 Springfield with an M1 grenade-launcher. The M7 grenade-launcher was not available for the M1 rifle until late 1943, and M8 grenade-launchers for the M1 carbine not until early 1944. Grenades could not be fired from the M1A1 carbine because of its folding stock. Folding-stock M1A1s were originally issued only to parachute engineers but were later authorized for other parachute troops. However, it was not uncommon for wooden-stock M1 carbines to be used; M1A1s were scarce before early 1943. M1 carbines were first issued in mid-1942, and in mid-1943 reports from Sicily were unfavorable. Prior to wider issue of carbines, M1 rifles and pistols were substituted.

Every parachutist except mess personnel was issued a .45cal M1911A1 pistol. This was rescinded in February 1944, and thereafter they were issued only to field grade officers; even weapons crewmen officially used M1 rifles or carbines.



Shoulder patch of 13th Airborne Division.

Until early 1944 there was one submachine gun per rifle squad, carried by the assistant squad leader/demolitions NCO. These were replaced with rifles in February 1944, and each company had only six SMGs as spares, but it was not uncommon for one or more to be acquired for rifle squads. The M1928A1 Thompson was replaced by M1/M1A1 Thompsons, and these in turn were replaced by the M3 “grease gun” in mid-1944; in practice, units often possessed a mix.

The M1918A2 Browning Automatic Rifle, the normal squad automatic weapon, was not issued to paratroopers as it was difficult to jump with. Instead, a .30cal M1919A4 tripod-mounted light machine gun was issued to each squad, to be parachuted in separate bundles, and a spare was provided for defensive situations. However, some units obtained BARs. The December 1944 T/O provided one M1919A6 LMG for each of the platoon’s three rifle squads, plus an optional-use BAR, and removed the spare LMGs. BARs were often used in lieu of the LMGs, but one or two LMGs were retained per platoon. (The M1919A6 LMG with a shoulder-stock and bipod could still be mounted on a tripod for sustained fire.)

The 2.36in M1A1 bazooka was issued in time for Sicily, and was also used in Normandy and Holland. The two-piece M9 and M9A1 bazookas were issued in late 1944; this breakdown design had been specifically requested by the Airborne Command. Each rifle platoon and the company HQ had a bazooka, and others were in the regimental and battalion HHCs and the service company for self-defense. Bazookas did not have dedicated crews, but some companies formed three or four two-man crews for attachment to platoons as necessary.

Each rifle platoon had a 60mm mortar squad. They were not always needed, so the crew might be used as riflemen or to man an LMG or bazooka. The battalion also had an 81mm M1 mortar platoon with four tubes. The August 1944 T/O provided three .50cal M2 machine guns in the service company, mounted on 2½-ton trucks. The 17th Abn Div received a small number of 57mm T15E9 and 75mm T21 recoilless rifles in the war’s last months. It is not clear how they were allocated, but possibly in sections at battalion level.

Vehicles

The PIR possessed far fewer and lighter vehicles than a standard infantry regiment – initially just 40, as opposed to over 200. The February 1942 T/O&E listed: 13x ¼-ton trucks (“jeeps”), 2x ¾-ton ambulances, 8x ¾-ton command and reconnaissance trucks, 16x 2½-ton trucks with 14x 1-ton trailers, and one sedan. Vehicle numbers were almost doubled in the December 1944 T/O&E: 26 jeeps with ¼-ton trailers, 2x ¾-ton ambulances, 28x 2½-ton trucks with 1-ton trailers, 52x motor scooters (very little used), and 34x handcarts. The infantry battalions had no organic vehicles other than eight handcarts for carrying 81mm mortars and ammunition.

The parachute infantry regiment, 1942–44

The February 17, 1942 T/O 7-31 was authorized 138 officers, 5 warrant officers, and 1,884 enlisted – 1,958 troops. The regimental headquarters and headquarters company (HHC), T/O 7-32, consisted of a regimental HQ and band, company HQ, communication and demolition platoons, and staff, operations, and intelligence sections. Bands were not generally constituted, thus reducing the regiment’s strength by one warrant officer and 28 enlisted. The 42-man communication platoon was organized into an HQ, message



Parachute infantry battalions had no organic motor vehicles, what few were authorized being concentrated at regimental level. The 1942 T/O&E had only 13 jeeps with no trailers, but the 1944 reorganization gave the PIR 26 jeeps all with ¼-ton trailers. These were not paraded but delivered by glider, or linked up as part of the ground echelon. They were mainly allocated for transporting radios, towing 75mm pack howitzers or 57mm AT guns, or as ambulances. The uncertainty of fuel resupply was always a problem. (Tom Laemlein/*Armor Plate Press*)

center, and wire and radio sections.² The 47-man demolition platoon contained explosives specialists; it had an HQ of 3 officers and 8 enlisted, and three 12-man battalion demolition sections. The 222-man regimental service company, T/O 7-33, was intended as a rear support element. It had a 24-man company HQ; a 73-man regimental HQ platoon (staff, regimental supply, and three battalion supply sections); a 53-man parachute maintenance and supply platoon (HQ, parachute supply, parachute maintenance, and parachute packing sections); and a 58-man transport platoon (HQ, an HHC section and three battalion sections, and a maintenance section). The 69-man regimental medical detachment had an HQ section providing the regimental aid station, and three battalion sections. Two chaplains were also attached.

The three parachute infantry battalions, T/O 7-35, each consisted of an HHC, T/O 7-36, and three rifle companies, T/O 7-37. The HHC had a six-man battalion HQ (CO, XO, principal staff); a 64-man HQ platoon (company HQ, battalion staff, communication, and mess sections); a 39-man mortar platoon (4x 81mm), and a 42-man light machine-gun platoon (8x .30cal LMG). The mortar and LMG platoons were divided into two sections, each weapon crew constituting a squad.

The 127-man rifle companies were organized into a 16-man HQ and three 36-man rifle platoons. The platoons were self-contained, each with their own LMGs and 60mm mortar rather than those weapons being assigned to a weapons platoon as in standard companies. Instead, the two 12-man rifle squads each had an LMG with a dedicated crew, and there were two additional unmanned guns in the platoon HQ for optional use. The reasoning behind this was to provide the platoon with a large amount of automatic firepower for raids or defensive situations, to make up for its light rifle strength. There were no BARs in the T/O, but it was not uncommon for units to obtain one per squad, and BARs replaced the spare LMGs, one per squad, in December 1944. The six-man 60mm mortar squad provided immediate close-range line-of-sight supporting fire. The platoon HQ was assigned

2 See Elite 181, *World War II Battlefield Communications*



Using an 18in M1942 machete, this 503rd PIR paratrooper training in New Guinea has cut a vine to obtain water. The M1942 machete had a darkened non-reflective blade, while the 22in M1939 had a polished blade; some parachute units were provided machetes with 16in parkerized blades. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

2 officers and 5 enlisted; there was an assistant platoon commander, since a platoon was carried aboard two C-47 transports and officers initially served as jumpmasters (NCOs were also soon trained in that role). The assistant could also replace a lost commander, and help assemble and organize scattered elements, but officer shortages often precluded the assignment of one. The radio and code corporal and radio operator were to provide the necessary communications when operating independently behind enemy lines, a legacy from the raider days. There was also a platoon sergeant and two messengers, with one detailed to the company HQ.

Bazookas were not listed on parachute regiment T/Os until 1944. It was originally thought they would not be able to be jumped on a paratrooper but only in equipment bundles, but methods were worked out for jumpers to carry them, and a special allocation was authorized in December 1942. Rifle companies received four, one for the HQ and one for each rifle platoon, to be operated by riflemen; there were no dedicated bazooka crews in the T/O. Some units did not receive bazookas until early 1943 or later.

Battalion combat teams generally received an engineer platoon (38 men) from the parachute engineer company plus small attachments from regiment: a demolition section (13), cooks (3), clerks (4), supply section (10), transport section (11), and medical section (19 men). Only the demolition and medical sections accompanied battalions into combat. Separate PIBs were augmented with the same assets, plus a 10-strong parachute supply section and a 12-strong packing section.

As for tactical employment, the 81mm mortar platoon remained under battalion control. The LMG platoon served the same general support role as the standard infantry battalion's two heavy machine-gun platoons with .30cal water-cooled guns, but lacked the M1917A1's long-range sustained fire. They might be used to defend the battalion CP, but normally one or two of the four two-gun sections would be attached to a rifle company. One of the three demolition sections from the demolition platoon would be attached to each battalion. It might be deployed as a unit and was sometimes used as scouts, or to augment the engineer platoon if attached, or in 3- or 4-man teams attached to each company.

It was not unusual for units to modify their organization. The rifle platoons' three 60mm mortars were sometimes formed into a company mortar section or platoon. In North Africa, 2/509th PIR formed a provisional weapons platoon in its HHC with a bazooka section and a Bren gun section (the latter obtained from the British while in the UK). The 503rd PIR in the Pacific reorganized its eight-gun battalion LMG platoons into three four-gun platoons, one to be attached to each rifle company. This was because they had replaced two squads' LMGs with BARs (the added 3rd Squad had an LMG).

A PIR, without attachments, required 117 transport aircraft, each C-47 Skytrain carrying 15–19 jumpers. A battalion required 36 aircraft, a rifle company nine, a PFAB 52 (12 per battery), and a parachute engineer company 12.



After an airborne assault the lightly equipped parachute units had to be opportunists. Here 101st Abn Div troops in France load 60mm mortar “cloverleaf” 9-round ammo containers (three rounds in each of the three tubes) onto a captured Pf22 pioneer cart towed by a *Kettenkrad* – an NSV HK101 halftrack motorcycle. The white dots show where the censor has obscured shoulder patches and helmet assembly markings. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

PIR organization and strength, T/O 7-3			
	Feb 1, 1942	Aug 1, 1944	Dec 16, 1944
Parachute Infantry Regiment	2,012	2,072	2,482
Regt HQ & HQ Company	131	125	132
Regt HQ (without band)	6	8	8
Company HQ	8	15	15
Operations Section	6	5	5
Intelligence Section	18	12	12
Mess Section	–	–	7
Communication Platoon	46	42	42
Demolition Platoon	47	43	43
Chaplain Section (attached)	2	2	2
Infantry Battalion (x3)	530	583	706
Bn HQ & HQ Company	149	193	178
Battalion HQ	4	6	6
Company HQ	*	19	25
HQ Platoon	64	77	55
Light Machine Gun Platoon	42	47	47
81mm Mortar Platoon	39	44	45
Rifle Company (x3)	127	130	176
Company HQ	16	22	29
Rifle Platoon (x3)	37	36	49
Service Company	222	94	114
Company HQ	24	27	21
Regt HQ Platoon	73	30	31
Transport Platoon	58	37	62
Prcht Maint & Supply Plat**	53	50	50
Medical Detachment	69	102	116
HQ (Regt Aid Station) Section	12	24	26
Bn Aid Station Section (x3)	19	26	30

Notes:

* Nine-man Company HQ Section was then a component of the HQ Platoon.

** Reassigned to divisional Prov Prcht Maint Co, unless separate unit.

The parachute infantry regiment, 1945

Numerous recommendations were submitted for adjusting parachute regiment manning and equipment after each operation. Often divisions implemented their own modifications; prior to the Normandy and Netherlands operations they had this luxury owing to over-strength personnel being provided from Stateside units still in training. Every regiment had its own minor variations, and it was not uncommon for a regiment's assigned strength to be somewhat higher than authorized by the T/O, at least until they entered combat. In late 1943 and early 1944 many regiments added third rifle squads to the platoons, using excess personnel. This gave them more staying power; aligned the company's firepower and capabilities closer to those of the standard rifle company; and allowed for standard infantry tactics, instead of officers having to adapt what they had learned in OCS to the handling of a two-squad platoon.

The August 1, 1944 regimental T/O was only 70 men larger than that of February 1, 1942. Most company HQs were enlarged; the service company was greatly reduced in strength, with some slots going to company HQs; and the medical detachment was enlarged. Crew-served weapons allocation remained the same. However, this T/O was generally *not implemented*, as the divisions were then either committed or deploying; there was little need for the reorganization, as the changes were minor and provided little benefit. The 13th Abn Div and its 515th PIR still in the States were apparently reorganized. Some units may have partly reorganized under this T/O – or, more likely,

B

503rd & 511th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENTS; SOUTHWEST PACIFIC, 1944–45

(1) Machine-gunner, 503rd PIR; Noemfoor Island, July

1944 The 1942 parachutist's uniform was too hot for the tropics, and did not long survive wear and tear, so in this theater the olive drab two-piece herringbone twill fatigue suit was commonly worn as combat uniform. In late 1943 the 503rd reorganized its rifle platoons into three 12-man squads, two with Browning Automatic Rifles and the third with an M1919A4 light machine gun; at the same time the rifle platoons' 60mm mortars were consolidated into a company mortar platoon. BARs were handier in the jungle, but the LMG was also useful. This gunner carries it on a folded towel as a shoulder pad, upside down, since the pintle for the tripod is fitted. He has an ammunition carrying bag holding a 250-round belt; it could alternatively accommodate three 48-round rifle bandoleers, eight 30-round SMG magazines, ten 20-round BAR magazines, three or four rifle grenades or six hand grenades. Each LMG crew had an 18in M1942 machete in a canvas or plastic scabbard, and most men carried two canteens.

(2) Rifleman, 511th PIR; Luzon, February 1945 Both regiments continued to carry their jump uniforms stowed in duffle bags, and pulled them out when a jump was planned. Expecting to link up with amphibiously-landed glider troops within hours, the 511th jumped onto Tagaytay Ridge in central Luzon with light loads but plenty of ammunition – hidden at this angle, two 48-round rifle bandoleers are slung crossways on his chest. His M1923 cartridge belt holds 80 rounds; it supports canteens, an M1942 first aid pouch, and, on the rear of the belt, the M2 jungle first aid kit. The "jungle

pack," made in both OD and camouflage fabric, proved unpopular; the main bag was not divided into internal compartments, so heavy loads shifted uncomfortably. Often just the top flap with its internal compartment was cut off and a shoulder strap was added to turn it into a haversack; M1936 musettes and gas mask cases were also used for the same purpose. Here the pack has an M1 bayonet attached on the left, and an M1943 folding entrenching tool on the back. Early in the operation, this soldier and his gear are relatively clean; during the winter rains on Leyte, conditions had been so bad that the Corcorans fell apart and had to be held together with friction tape.

(3) & (4) Pocket patches, 503rd & 511th PIR respectively.

(5) The "Swing cap," particular to the 11th Abn Div and named after its commanding general, was also worn to some extent in the 503rd PIR. It was made in both khaki and OD twill. It was often worn without insignia, but officers' rank, an "Airborne" tab, or paratrooper's jumpwings might be displayed on the front, and the parachute patch on one side.

(6) Plastic case of waterproof matches, with miniature compass in screw-off lid, as carried in the jungle.

(7) During the Tagaytay Ridge operation the 511th found Japanese Type 91 hand grenades fired from "knee mortars" which had not exploded because the arming pins had not been pulled. The paratroopers removed the spent propellant and taped them under Mk IIA1 fragmentation grenades, thus doubling the blast.

(8) The M2 jungle first aid kit contained athlete's foot solution, a 1oz bottle of iodine, insect repellent, halazone water purification tablets, atabrine antimalaria tablets, 8x sulfadiazine tablets, a field dressing and 3x adhesive bandages.



Displaying a war trophy for the photographer was a favorite paratrooper pastime. Note that the man on the left has the thick-looking "Air Corps" rifle clip holders on his belt either side of his canteen. Above them, among his Mk II fragmentation grenades, is a French M37 grenade probably taken from a German. The man on the right carries a bright 22in M1939 machete, rather than the more common dark-bladed 18in M1942. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)



under draft editions of the December 16, 1944 T/O available after the operation in Holland.

The December 1944 T/O was not implemented in Europe until March 1945, a month before VE Day, within the 13th, 17th, 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions. The 11th Abn Div and 503rd PIR in the Pacific did not reorganize until July. The new T/O increased the regiment's strength by 410 men over that of February 1942, mainly because the addition of third rifle squads increased the 37-man rifle platoon to 49. The regimental HHC received a small mess section; the service company's transportation platoon was almost doubled in size, from 16 to 28x 2½-ton trucks; all company HQs were enlarged, and the medical detachment was slightly enlarged.

Separate parachute infantry battalions

Several separate parachute infantry battalions were raised. The first four were the 501st and 502nd Prcht Bns and the 503rd and 504th Prcht Inf Bns (the first two did not include "Infantry" in their designations). Most were absorbed into later-forming PIRs, but others continued as separate units. Three of these were activated with a parent regiment designation despite the rest of the regiment never being raised. Two (2nd Bn, 509th PIR, and 3rd Bn, 542nd PIR) were redesignated 509th and 542nd PIBs. The 1st Bn, 551st PIR retained that designation throughout its existence even though it was commonly known as the "551st PIB." The 542nd PIB remained in the States as a training unit. The African-American 555th PIB also remained in the US, as "smoke jumpers" combating Japanese balloon-bombs on the West Coast.

Separate Parachute Infantry Battalions

(in order of activation:)

1st Parachute Battalion

activated Ft Benning, GA – Sept 16, 1940
redesignated 501st Prcht Bn – Oct 1
redesignated 1st Bn, 501st PIR – Feb 15, 1942
assets to new 2nd Bn, 503rd PIR – Nov 2

502nd Parachute Battalion

activated Ft Benning – July 1, 1941
redesignated 1st Bn, 502nd PIR – Feb 24, 1942

503rd Parachute Infantry Battalion

activated Ft Benning – Aug 22, 1941
redesignated 1st Bn, 503rd PIR – Feb 24, 1942

504th Parachute Infantry Battalion

activated Ft Benning – Oct 5, 1941
consolidated with 2nd Bn, 503rd PIR – Feb 24, 1942

2nd Battalion, 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment
activated in UK (from 2nd Bn, 503rd PIR) – Nov 2, 1942

redesignated 509th Prcht Inf Bn – Dec 10, 1943
inactivated – March 1, 1945

1st Battalion, 551st Parachute Infantry Regiment
activated Ft Kobbe, Panama Canal Zone – Nov 26, 1942

inactivated – Feb 10, 1945

3rd Battalion, 542nd Parachute Infantry Regiment

activated Ft Benning – Sept 1, 1943
redesignated 542nd Prcht Inf Bn – March 17, 1944
inactivated – July 1, 1945

555th Parachute Infantry Battalion (Colored)

activated Camp Mackall, NC – Nov 25, 1944
inactivated – Aug 22, 1950

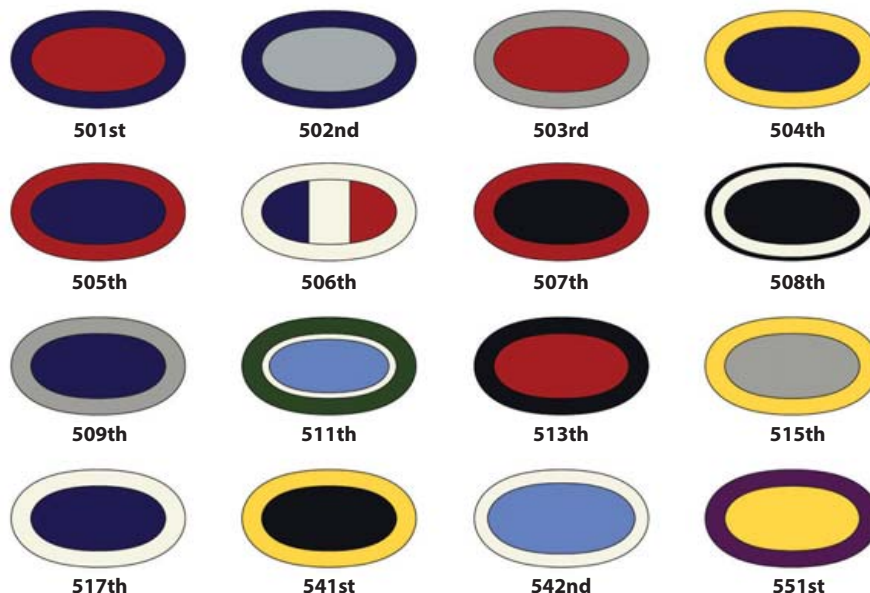
Insignia

Paratroopers sported a variety of insignia, official and unofficial. The most noticeable was the division's **shoulder patch** on the left sleeve, worn whether personnel were assigned or attached to it. An arched "Airborne" tab above the patch was displayed by all personnel, whether parachute, glider, or airborne (the latter term referred to units trained and equipped for glider and air-transport landing as well as parachute troops). The 82nd's white-on-blue tab and the 101st's yellow-on-black became the standard, and new airborne divisions restricted themselves to those colors.



The censor has not blotted out the 82nd Abn Div shoulder patch worn by this platoon leader briefing his men before Operation Market-Garden. Officers were assigned M1A1 carbines, but many preferred the more powerful, accurate and longer-ranged M1 Garand. The background trooper immediately left of the lieutenant's head has the standard rifle ammunition bandoleer with six pockets. This held either 48 or 60 rounds: each pocket took either one 8-rd clip for the Garand or two 5-rd clips for the M1903 Springfield. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

Parachute infantry regiment jumpwing ovals. PIRs had these made up locally to wear with their jumpwings; they might be entirely of cut felt, entirely embroidered, or partly embroidered on felt. Some units did not acquire them before the end of the war, and they were often unavailable to units despite being authorized. (Sam Embleton)



Regiments not assigned to divisions and still in the States wore the Abn Cmd patch adopted on March 23, 1943 (red shield bearing white glider above white parachute, below yellow-on-black “Airborne” tab); or, in some instances, the GHQ Reserve patch (red, white and blue horizontally striped disc within a wide white “donut” border). Some units continued to wear the Abn Cmd patch overseas. Once overseas, the separate regiments were normally assigned to numbered field armies and attached to corps or

C 504th & 505th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENTS; SICILY & ITALY, 1943

(1) **Assistant squad leader, 1/504th PIR, Sicily** During the Sicily jump the 504th were widely scattered, and fought in small groups. This assistant squad leader armed with a Thompson SMG would be a corporal, but rank was seldom worn in combat. A US flag patch is sewn to his right sleeve 3in below the shoulder seam; obscured from this angle, the shoulder-sleeve patch of the 82nd Abn Div was worn a half-inch below the seam on the left sleeve, and he has a black-on-white name tape above his left breast pocket. His M1C helmet bears on both sides the 504th's skull-and-crossbones unit identifier: the HHC wore it in white, the 1/504th red, 2/504th yellow, and 3/504th blue, but these were not widely seen. Many men used ½-in mesh helmet nets. After landing, many men discarded the leather chin cup from the helmet strapping; the web A-straps fixed to the liner either hung loose, or were (awkwardly) tucked up between the liner and the shell. His web gear includes the M1936 pistol belt, suspenders and musette bag; a parachute first aid kit might be tied low on the left suspenders, in order not to interfere with shouldering a weapon. On his belt are a canteen; holstered M1911A1 pistol, with blackened Mk I “brass knuckle” trench knife behind it; M1923 pistol magazine pouch; M1942 first aid pouch, and M1938 pouch for the lensatic compass. His weapon is the Thompson M1A1, with

20-round magazine; he carries six of these on his left hip in the slung case designed for the 30-round magazines (note that the shoulder strap passes under his belt to keep the case steady). At his feet is an SMG holster, as used during the jump.

(2) **Rocket gunner, HHC, 505th PIR, Italy** Though they were seldom seen, this regiment used rampant-lion helmet identifiers. Each platoon formed a two-man bazooka team with a 2.36in M1A1 rocket-launcher; on the ground is an early-style M6 bag for three rockets in their cardboard transport tubes. His personal weapon is the M1 carbine – the folding-stock M1A1 was not yet widely available. His basic web gear is as C1, but on his belt are an M3 trench knife in a leather M6 scabbard, and four carbine magazine pockets each holding two 15-round magazines.

(3) & (4) Pocket patches, 504th & 505th PIR respectively; little used, these were both of 6in diameter.

(5) After victory in Sicily the 505th's commander, Col James Gavin, contracted local nuns to make up special badges to award men who had knocked out a tank with the earlier M1 bazooka used there. Roughly 4in wide, and varying in color details (e.g. OD bazooka, yellow lightning), it was worn on the left pocket of the service dress coat below the buttoned flap.

(6) Case for 30-round submachine-gun magazines.

(7) M1923 pistol magazine pocket.

(8) M1 carbine magazine pocket.

(9) M1938 lensatic compass and case.



divisions; they might display the army's patch, but never those of lower formations.

Though the **garrison or overseas cap** had fallen from use after World War I it had been retained by the Army Air Corps. It was resurrected in July 1940 for the Parachute Test Platoon, who wore it with their mechanics' coveralls during ground training. The campaign or "Smokey Bear" hat was still in use, but the fledgling paratroopers began wearing khaki garrison caps with their khaki service uniforms. This led to the wearing of olive drab caps with OD uniforms in place of the visored service or "saucer cap"; this "bus driver cap" has ever since been shunned by paratroopers. Company and field grade officers displayed interwoven gold-colored and black piping on the garrison cap, and warrant officers silver-colored and black. In parachute regiments the enlisted men's caps were piped in light ("robin's egg") blue; men of the regimental medical detachment wore maroon piping, PFAB personnel red, and engineers interwoven red and white.

The commander of the Parachute Test Platoon, 1st Lt William T. Ryder, designed the first parachute unit insignia. This was a 2¼-in circular light blue patch with a white parachute and border (some were smaller), worn on the left side of the garrison cap curtain 1in from the front edge by enlisted men, and on the right side by officers, who wore rank insignia on the left side. It was approved in 1941, and entered in the uniform regulations that August as the "**airborne cap insignia**." In August 1944 a patch combining the white parachute and glider on a medium blue disc with a red border was issued to parachute, glider, and airborne units alike. Some men sewed a silver dollar under it as emergency funds (and to slap an antagonist in the face during a bar altercation). Together the airborne cap insignia or "parachute patch" and the garrison cap were known as the "airborne cap." It was often worn with field uniforms in rear areas, a practice not seen in other Army units.

The parachutist badge or "**jumpwings**" was first awarded on March 15, 1941 to the 501st Prcht Bn upon completion of jump school. It was designed by Capt William P. Yarborough, the Provisional Parachute Group's S-2. The oxidized silver badge measured 1½in across and ⅞in high, and was earned by making five qualifying jumps in the three- to four-week jump school. Wings were worn above the left breast pocket, above any ribbons; many paratroopers thought it was bad luck to polish them.

When the 501st Prcht Bn received its jumpwings they looked disappointingly small, so to dress them up Capt Yarborough designed a cloth oval worn behind the wings. This first **jumpwing oval** was red with a blue border. All PIRs eventually adopted similar "airborne background trimmings"; there were many variations in size and exact shape, but they were typically 2 ⅜in wide by 1 ⅝in high.

Most regiments adopted unofficial **pocket patches** influenced by Army Air Forces squadron patches (parachute units could procure items from the AAF). Few of these were professionally designed, and some were frankly amateurish. They were mainly worn by officers on the left chest of A-2 leather flight jackets. Enlisted men sometimes wore them on M1941 Parsons field jackets and jumpsuit jackets, but generally only in the States.

As one of the most distinctive uniform items of the paratrooper, the **jump boots** are considered almost an "insignia" in their own right. Highly spit-shined and with the trousers bloused into the boot tops, the boots are as much a source of pride to many paratroopers as their jumpwings. They are also somewhat sensitive about them. The derogatory term "straight-leg" or simply

“leg” is derived from the “straight” trouser legs of non parachute-qualified troops. “Legs” caught wearing jump boots on pass were taught on the spot that they could be converted to low-quarter shoes with the aid of a paratrooper’s switchblade knife. Jump boots were called “Corcorans” after the original 1941 manufacturer, though they were also made by other firms. The dark brown boots had thick soles, capped toes, and were higher topped than other boots. In 1944 the issue of jump boots ceased and they were replaced with “double buckle” M1944 combat boots as issued to other units – much to the paratroopers’ disappointment. Many ceased wearing them routinely in the field, but preserved them for off-duty wear and when making combat jumps. They would purchase their own Corcorans with their extra jump pay – \$50 a month for enlisted and \$100 for officers. They also used this extra pay to have uniforms professionally tailored, taking great pride in their smartness.

THE REGIMENTS IN COMBAT

The note-form listing at the end of each regimental history repeats the dates of the regiment’s and component units’ activation; key assignments; arrival in a theater of operations; any redesignations; combat jumps (assaults), and inactivation. It also lists unit citations, other awards, and Medal of Honor recipients. Note that prior to 1966, while commonly called the “Presidential Unit Citation,” the PUC was officially the “Organization Citation.”

Some of the inactivated regiments were later reactivated as airborne infantry regiments (AIR), as were glider regiments. The Army ceased glider training in 1949, and the former glider-riders became paratroopers.

501st PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT

Geronimo!

There were two 501st PIRs. The 1st Prcht Bn was activated at Ft Benning, GA on September 1, 1940 and redesignated 501st Prcht Bn on October 1. In August 1941 it deployed to Ft Kobbe, Panama Canal Zone; there it served as part of the Canal defense force, and prepared for contingency operations on Vichy French-held Martinique in the event the Germans attempted to occupy French Caribbean possessions. On February 15, 1942 it was redesignated 1st Bn, 501st PIR, but the regiment itself was not activated. In October 1942 the 503rd PIR arrived in Panama and 1/501st joined it, minus Company C. En route to Australia, 1/501st PIR was inactivated on November 2 and its assets, along with A/1/504th, became 2/503rd PIR (the original 2/503rd had deployed to Britain to become 2/509th PIR). The original 501st ceased to exist.

A new 501st PIR was activated at Camp Toccoa, GA on November 15, 1942 under Col Howard R. (“Jumpy” or “Skeets”) Johnson, and assigned to the Abn Cmd – in fact, the eighth PIR to be activated. Filled with volunteers, few of them parachute-qualified, it moved to Ft Benning on March 23, 1943 for parachute training, then to Camp Mackall on April 13. Assigned to the 2nd Abn Inf Bde in September, it undertook maneuvers and prepared for overseas deployment.³

³ 2nd Abn Inf Bde (June 20, 1943 to January 15, 1945) was an administrative HQ overseeing the 501st and 508th PIRs. It was absorbed into the 82nd Abn Div in January 1944.



Paratroopers awaiting the order to board a C-47, in this case for the assault into the South of France in August 1944. All wear jump uniforms camouflaged with streaks of green paint, and small-mesh helmet nets. The reclining man at left has (as was a common practice) a single 81mm mortar round in its packing tube secured under the flap of his musette bag; after landing he will drop this off at the assembly area for the mortar crews. The reclining man at right has a Griswold container for his disassembled Garand rifle, and the man standing behind him has the new M3 "grease gun" SMG. Note that many of these men are smoking cigarettes, and smoking was even permitted in flight. While the smallest ashes would instantly burn through a nylon parachute canopy, the 'chutes were safely packed inside cotton-fabric containers. After the war, when nylon webbing and other components were introduced, it became a different matter. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

In January 1944 the "Geronimos" moved to Camp Myles Standish, MA, and arrived in Britain on January 31. On May 1 the unit was attached to the 101st Abn Div, to which it remained attached until deactivated.

There was little time to integrate into the division's invasion plan before the Normandy operation. On June 6, 1/501st and 2/501st would jump onto DZ D north of Carentan, to secure two bridges a mile to the southeast. Most of the 1st Bn landed near the DZ, but 2/501st was widely scattered 4 miles north. The 3/501st was division reserve, landing on DZ C with the 506th. It seized the southernmost exit from Utah Beach, then fought southwestward with the 506th. The regiment was engaged until June 27, when it rehabilitated before returning to Britain on July 10.

On September 17, 1944 the 501st dropped onto DZ B between Best and Schijndel, Holland, and successfully seized bridges over the Willems Canal and Aa river. Rather than being withdrawn, it then defended "The Island" between the Rhine and Waal into November. Colonel Johnson died on October 8, to be replaced by LtCol Julian J. Ewell.

In late November the 501st was withdrawn to Reims (Rheims) in the Champagne region of France, but on December 18 it was rushed to Bastogne, Belgium to help stem the Ardennes offensive. The 501st defended the eastern perimeter. Ewell was wounded on January 9, 1945 and replaced by LtCol Robert A. Ballard. The regiment attacked northwards, and in mid-January established defenses on the Moder river in Alsace-Lorraine until relieved in February. It moved to Mourmelon le Petit, rehabilitated, and prepared to parachute into POW camps if the Germans began executing prisoners. The regiment rejoined the 101st Abn Div at Berchtesgaden, Germany, and was inactivated in August at Bad Gastein.

The regiment's nickname of "Geronimos" originated in 1940 on the night before the 501st PB made its first mass jump. While beer-drinking with his buddies after seeing the Western movie *Geronimo* (1939), Pvt Aubrey Eberhardt declared that he would shout "Geronimo!" when he jumped, to prove that he was in command of his faculties and unafraid. This he did, and the shout became the unit's custom. The descendants of the Chiricahua Apache war chief approved the practice.

501st Parachute Infantry Regiment

1st Bn activated – Feb 24, 1941 (from 501st Prcht Bn)

1st Bn inactivated – Nov 2, 1942 (to 2/503rd PIR)

501st PIR activated with new 1st Bn – Nov 15

assigned to Abn Cmd – Dec 15

assigned to 2nd Abn Inf Bde – Sept 3, 1943

arrived in UK – Jan 31, 1944

attached to 101st Abn Div – May 1

assaulted into France – June 6

assaulted into Netherlands – Sept 17

501st PIR inactivated – Aug 10, 1945

Awards:

PUC – Normandy; PUC – Bastogne; French Croix de Guerre w/Palm – Normandy; Netherlands Orange Lanyard; Belgian Croix de Guerre w/Palm – Bastogne; Belgian Fourragère; Belgian Order of the Day – Bastogne; Belgian Order of the Day – France & Belgium

502nd PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT

Strike

The 1/502nd PIR was activated at Ft Benning from the 502nd Prcht Bn on February 14, 1942; the rest of the regiment was activated on March 2. After training it was assigned to the 101st Abn Div on August 15 as its first parachute regiment. It relocated to Ft Bragg on September 24, and, after almost a year of training, to Camp Shanks, NY on August 24, 1943. The "Five-Oh-Deuce" or "The Deuce" was commanded by Col John G. Van Horn Moseley, Jr. Arriving in Britain on October 18, 1943, it undertook intense training for Normandy during the next seven months.

"The Deuce" was to jump on DZ A behind Utah Beach, but the sticks were very widely scattered, some up to 5 miles away, resulting in only small elements assembling. The 3/502nd seized the two causeway exits from Utah; Col Moseley broke his leg, and LtCol John H. Michaelis took over. The regiment fought southwards, seizing Carentan. At the end of June it was sent to Cherbourg, and soon returned to Britain.

On September 17 the 502nd jumped onto DZ C north of Best, Holland to secure bridges over the Dommel at St Oedenrode and Best; they also secured the glider landing zones. Fighting in the Zonsche Forest, LtCol Michaelis was wounded and LtCol Steve Chappuis assumed command. The regiment defended "The Island" southwest of Arnhem into November, when it was moved to France.

The .45cal M3 "grease gun" began to be issued just before the Normandy operation, though the modified M3A1 did not see combat before the war's end. This paratrooper has two 30-rd magazines fastened together with black friction tape, resting on his lap with his horsehide gloves. Note the parachute first aid kit tied to his helmet net; and the fact that he has cut the center out of the cup of his leather chinstrap – some men found this more comfortable. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)



On December 18 the regiment was rushed to Bastogne with the rest of the 101st, and defended the northern and northwestern perimeters. The siege was lifted on December 26, but vicious fighting continued into January 1945. The regiment reached the Moder river and defended it until February 23, when it was relieved. The 502nd reached the Rhine on April 2, operating there until the beginning of May, when it headed south and secured the Berchtesgaden area. Thereafter the regiment performed occupation duty in Austria, until inactivated on November 30, 1945 in France.

502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment

1st Bn activated – Feb 24, 1942 (from 502nd Prcht Bn)

502nd PIR activated – March 2

assigned to 101st Abn Div – August 15

arrived UK – Oct 18, 1943

assaulted into France – June 6, 1944

assaulted into Netherlands – Sept 17

502nd PIR inactivated – Nov 30, 1945

Awards:

PUC – Normandy; PUC – Bastogne; French Croix de Guerre w/Palm – Normandy; Netherlands Orange Lanyard; Belgian Croix de Guerre w/Palm – Bastogne; Belgian Fourragère; Belgian Order of the Day – Bastogne; Belgian Order of the Day – France & Belgium.

Medals of Honor: LtCol Robert G. Cole; Pfc Joe E. Mann (only MoH awards in 101st Abn Div)

503rd PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT/ REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

The Rock

The 503rd's 1st and 2nd Bns were activated at Ft Benning on February 24, 1942 from the 503rd and 504th PIBs. The regiment followed on March 2, and was relocated to Ft Bragg two weeks later; there LtCol William M. Miley took command, and it was assigned to the Abn Cmd. The 3/503rd was activated on June 8; LtCol Robert F. Sink was the first CO, but on July 29 command

503rd PIR, Corregidor, February 1945: the crew of an M1919A4 light machine gun provides covering fire. The M1A1 ammunition cans held 250 belted rounds; while OD belts were eventually issued, the conspicuous white web belts were used throughout the war. Note, left, an M1A1 carbine with a two-pocket magazine pouch attached to the right side of the folding stock – it was by pure chance, not design, that this could be done. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)



passed to LtCol Kenneth H. Kinsler. The 2/503rd was detached and departed for Scotland in July, and would eventually become 2/509th PIR. Filled with recent jump-school graduates and men from other units, the 503rd moved to Camp Stoneman, CA in mid-October 1942, and soon departed for Panama. There it picked up 1/501st PIR, which became the new 2/503rd on November 2, 1942. The regiment landed in Queensland, Australia on December 2, and for eight months thereafter it conducted jungle training, before departing for Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea on August 15, 1943.

On September 5 the 503rd jumped into New Guinea's Markham river valley near the northeast coast to secure Nadzab village and an airstrip. Their mission was to block the withdrawal of Japanese forces as Australian units attacked overland and from the sea. This was the only Pacific Theater jump in which an entire regiment was jumped the same day. There was no resistance on the three DZs; elements of 7th Australian Div were flown in the next day, and the 503rd was relieved on the 10th. By September 19 it had returned to Port Moresby, and trained replacements until flown to Brisbane on February 2, 1944. On October 20, Col Kinsler committed suicide for unknown reasons; LtCol George M. Jones took command.

Noemfoor Island off the coast of Dutch New Guinea was to be seized to establish airfields and, on July 2, 1944 the 158th Inf Regt conducted an amphibious assault. Flying from Hollandia, New Guinea, 1/ and 3/503rd PIR jumped onto Kamiri Airdrome to reinforce the landing force on July 3 and 4, respectively. They suffered extensive jump injuries caused by parked vehicles and obstacles, and 2/503rd was delivered by ship. The 503rd cleared the island's southern half by the end of August. The commander of the 11th Abn Div requested the 503rd be attached to his division, but Gen MacArthur retained it for special operations.

In August the 462nd PFAB and Co C (Prcht), 161st Abn Engr Bn were assigned to the regiment, which became the 503rd Prcht Regimental Combat Team. On November 19 the PRCT landed on Leyte to prepare for future operations. On December 15 the regiment conducted an amphibious assault on Mindoro to seize four airstrips and establish a lodgement.

After two months of patrolling and raids, on January 25, 1945 the 503rd was alerted for a jump onto Corregidor. They would conduct a parachute assault on The Rock on February 16 with 3rd and 2nd Battalions – probably the most dangerous airborne assault during World War II. An infantry battalion came ashore by landing craft, and 1/503rd was shipped in the next day. The island was not secured until March 2.

Returned to Mindoro on March 9, the regiment rehabilitated for a month. On April 9 it landed, minus 1/503rd, on Negros Island, which the 40th Inf Div had assaulted on March 29. On April 23, 1st Bn also arrived, and the regiment cleared the island's rugged interior until June 20, by which time it had lost half its strength to combat and exhaustion. Colonel Joe S. Lawaie assumed command on August 10.



BAR gunner from the 503rd PIR on Corregidor, wearing the M1937 six-pocket BAR magazine belt. The bipod was usually removed to save 2.5lb weight. Two of the three squads in the regiment's rifle platoons were issued a BAR, while the third kept the .30cal M1919A4 LMG. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

With the war over, short-serving paratroopers were transferred to the 11th Abn Div and the long-serving vets were shipped to Camp Anza, CA, where the 503rd PRCT was inactivated on December 24, 1945.

503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment

1st & 2nd Bns activated – Feb 24, 1942 (from 503rd & 504th Prcht Inf Bns)

503rd PIR activated – March 2

assigned to Abn Cmd – March 21

3rd Bn activated – June 8

2nd Bn inactivated – Nov 2 (to 1/509th PIR)

new 2nd Bn activated – Nov 2 (from 1/501st PIR)

arrived Australia – Dec 2

assigned to Sixth Army – Dec 6

assaulted Nadzab, New Guinea – Sept 5, 1943

assaulted Noemfoor Island – July 3–4, 1944 (1st & 2nd Bns)

D

502nd & 505th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENTS; NORMANDY, JUNE 6, 1944

Beneath their jumpsuits the paratroopers of the 82nd and 101st Abn Divs wore the wool flannel shirt and wool serge trousers, both in “olive drab” – though the former was actually a dark tan shade and the latter a mustard-brown. Over the wool uniforms some wore green OD herringbone twill fatigues, impregnated with an anti-vessicant (anti-mustard gas) compound. The riggers of both divisions modified one jumpsuit per man for the Normandy operation. This involved adding impregnated HBT reinforcement patches on the elbows and knees, and also inserts into the bottom and sides of the jacket skirt pockets and expanding trouser pockets. These prevented pocket bottoms ripping out with the shock of the canopy opening, or simply when over-filled. Paratroopers stuffed their pockets with everything from grenades to D-ration bars, and in the 505th PIR the specified pocket contents totaled almost 9lb in weight.

(1) Technician 5th grade, 502nd PIR The technical grades, established in January 1942, were a way of recognizing specialist skills, but such men were considered junior to the line NCO leaders. However, they could be assigned as assistant squad leaders – a corporal’s position, or a sergeant’s from December 1943 – and the Tech 5 or Tech 4 would be addressed as “corporal” or “sergeant”. This Tech 5 has peeled off his web gear and jacket to allow an arm wound to be dressed. As well as their own first aid packets paratroopers were issued these British “shell dressings”; at 6in x 8in opened the pad was larger than the US type, and was pre-medicated. Note that while the jump trousers could be held up by the M1937 web trouser belt, most men used suspenders. His discarded jacket shows the flag patch on the right upper sleeve. His weapon is the folding-butt M1A1 carbine.

(2) Corporal, 505th PIR This “hard-stripe” NCO also has the M1C helmet with netting and burlap garnish, and the same uniform, showing the 82nd Abn Div patch and roughly hand-painted rank chevrons on his left sleeve. On his right upper arm is the pale brown British-made gas-detection brassard looped to the end of his jacket epaulet; the impregnated paper would turn pink-red in the presence of gas. His M1 rifle (background) has an M7 grenade-launcher attached, and he carries a slung grenade bag in addition to web gear based on

the M1923 rifle cartridge belt. Note the M3 knife attached to his ankle, and the old T-handle M1928 entrenching tool still being carried. (In North Africa the 505th and 2/509th had used a cut-down version of this.)

(3) Type A-5 aerial delivery container The canvas and web “para-pac” measured 56in long (including its parachute compartment at one end) by 15in diameter, and here has a Type A-1 assembly lamp fitted. Colored filters over the lenses at both ends identified the pack contents on a dark DZ – here, red for ammunition (the canopy of the 24ft G-1 cargo parachute would also be red). Individuals sometimes carried these lamps as assembly aids.

(4) The “M1 carbine holster” held the M1A1 (but not the wooden-stocked M1) during the jump, and could also be used to carry it when on the ground.

(5) Pocket patch, 502nd PIR.

(6) Infantry officer’s collar insignia with regimental number; all regiments had these, for use on dress and service uniform collars in conjunction with the “U.S.” cipher.

(7) Unique to the Normandy operation, the brass “cricket” was much more widely used in the 101st Abn Div than in the 82nd; some were punched with a hole for a retaining cord. Scattered paratroopers used it as a friend-or-foe identifier, pressing it to make a “click-clack” sound, to which the correct response was “click-clack, click-clack”.

(8) The M2 pocketknife was issued to all paratroopers to cut themselves free of suspension lines and harnesses if necessary. It had a 3in switchblade, and was carried in one of two small pockets under the collar of the jump jacket.

(9) Two types of British AT grenades were issued to the US paratroopers. The No.75 Mk II “Hawkins” mine-grenade could be used in either mode, and was detonated by a pressure plate; two thrown into a tank’s track would break it. The Hawkins was 6.55in long x 3.75in wide x 2.25in thick.

(10) The No. 82 Mk I “Gammon” grenade was impact-detonated; its expanding fabric bag could be filled with varied amounts of plastic explosive.

(11) The US M16 smoke grenade was available in red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet and black. The orange was first used in Normandy to mark “friendly” locations for supporting aircraft and naval gunfire observers.



to 503rd PRCT – August
assigned to Eighth Army – Jan 1, 1945
assigned to Sixth Army – Jan 6
assaulted Corregidor Island – Feb 16 (2nd & 3rd Bns)
503rd PIR inactivated – Dec 25, 1945

Awards:

PUC – Corregidor; Philippine PUC – Oct 17, 1944 to July 4, 1945
Medals of Honor: Sgt Ray E. Eubanks; Pvt Lloyd G. McCarter

504th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT/ REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

Strike – Hold

The 504th PIR was activated at Ft Benning on May 1, 1942, under command of Col Theodore L. Dunn, and was immediately assigned to the Abn Cmd. After basic and parachute training it was assigned to the 82nd Abn Div on August 15 as that division's first PIR, and moved to Ft Bragg on September 30. Training continued until April 1943, when the division moved to Camp Edwards, MA, and departed for North Africa in May. Landing in Morocco on May 10, the regiment prepared for the Sicily invasion.

On the night of July 9, 1943 the 505th PIR, led by 3/504th, jumped into Sicily; the remainder of the 504th jumped in the following night. Overall the operation was muddled, with friendly AA fire destroying US troop transports. However, despite being so widely scattered that some had to fight virtually as guerrillas for many days, the paratroopers disrupted German reinforcements. The 504th continued to fight on the ground into August, when the island was secured. It was there that a German officer bestowed their nickname, "Devils in Baggy Pants."

On the way to Sicily, a rifle platoon leader gives last-minute details to his stick; note the metal rank bar on his shoulder – unusual for combat dress. His M1A1 carbine is tucked behind his reserve parachute, and a musette bag is tied to his left leg with a cord – this would be released before landing. The man at right has a cloth A-9 summer flying helmet, which could be worn under the steel helmet for warmth. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)



By August 20 the unit was moved to Tunisia to prepare for the invasion of Italy, then back to Sicily from where they would launch. The assault would go in at Salerno on September 9, 1943; the 504th (minus 3rd Bn) made a reinforcement jump on the night of September 13/14, and were immediately pushed into the middle of the perimeter to beat off German counterattacks. The 3/504th was landed by ship on the 15th and joined the regiment. On September 19 they were in reserve on the south end of the perimeter, and then attacked toward Naples, which was entered by the 82nd Abn Div on October 1. In mid-October the 504th was attached to the British Eighth Army to reinforce the line. In mid-November the 82nd departed for Britain, but the 504th PIR, 376th PFAB, and Co C (Prcht), 307th Abn Engr Bn remained in Italy to provide US Fifth Army with a parachute regimental combat team capability (although they were not used in that role). In December 1943 the regiment – commanded from December 16 by Col Reuben Tiucker – was attached to the 36th Inf Div during the San Pietro battle, and then to the First Special Service Force.⁴ On December 27 the 504th was pulled out to prepare for the Anzio landings.

After the initial assault the 504th was landed by ship, and on January 29, 1944 the regiment attacked toward Cisterna (where 1st and 3rd Ranger Bns were wiped out). Through February and March the 504th fought off counterattacks. Pulled out of the line, the regiment departed for Britain, and arrived on April 23 to rejoin the 82nd Abn Div. Resting and retraining, it “sat out” Normandy.

On September 17, 1944 the 504th jumped near Grave, Holland on DZ O, as the first troops to land during Operation *Market-Garden*. An assault had to be made across the Waal river at Nijmegen in daylight; Cos H and I, 3rd Bn made the crossing in small boats, suffering heavy casualties. After hard fighting, the 504th moved to France for rest. Through December 1944 and January 1945 it helped fight off the German Ardennes offensive. With the front stabilized, it attacked the Siegfried Line (*Westwall*) in February 1945. Moved back to France, it was deployed along the Rhine on April 1. The regiment assaulted, and reached the Elbe on May 3. The 82nd Abn Div then performed occupation duty in Berlin. The regiment returned to the States in January 1946, and remained an active unit.

504th Parachute Infantry Regiment

504th PIR activated – May 1, 1942

assigned to Abn Cmd – May 1

assigned to 82nd Abn Div – Aug 15

arrived in Morocco – May 10, 1943

assaulted into Sicily – July 9 (3rd Bn), July 11 (2nd & 1st Bns)

assaulted at Salerno, Italy – Sept 13 (1st & 2nd Bns)

to 504th PRCT – Nov

assaulted into Netherlands – Sept 17, 1944

redesignated 504th AIR – Dec 15, 1947



A paratrooper awaiting a lift to Sicily is posed as if cleaning his fingernails with an M1918 Mk I “knuckle-duster” trench knife. World War I had ended before they could be issued to the AEF; they were widely distributed to paratroopers, and although officially replaced in 1943 by the M3 trench knife they were often retained through 1945. The A-8 rigid cargo container with the cheesy motto is attached to a C-47’s bomb shackle. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

4 See Elite 145, *First Special Service Force 1942–44*



A corporal from the 82nd Abn Div dons his T-5 parachute in Sicily, ready for a drop into Italy; in this case the national flag patch is worn on his left shoulder instead of the division insignia. Note the M2A1 training gas mask and the M1910 pick-mattock (issued two per squad) on his left hip, and the odd location of the canteen at the front. Attachments to the web gear had to be shifted around to accommodate the parachute harness over the top; once the paratrooper was on the ground he could re-arrange his kit in a more convenient way. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

Awards:

PUC – Anzio Beachhead (3rd Bn); PUC – Nijmegen, Holland (1st & 3rd Bns); PUC – Cheneux, Belgium (1st Bn); PUC – Salerno (Co K); PUC – Rhine River (Co A); Netherlands Military Order of William – Nijmegen; Netherlands Orange Lanyard; Belgian Fourragère; Belgian Order of the Day – Ardennes; Belgian Order of the Day – Belgium & Germany Medal of Honor: Pvt John R. Towle

505th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT

H-Minus

The 505th followed in the boot tracks of its sister 504th, but was activated two months later on July 6, 1942 at Ft Benning, and assigned to the Abn Cmd. It was not assigned to the 82nd Abn Div until February 10, 1943. Moving to Ft Bragg two days later, it experienced difficulty integrating into the division. After moving to Camp Edwards it departed for Morocco, arriving on May 10. Commanded by Col James M. Gavin, the entire regiment, reinforced by 3/504th, jumped northeast of Gela, Sicily on the night of July 9, 1943. Most troops were accounted for, and on July 19 they fought northwards along the coast. The 505th cut across Sicily's western bulge, seizing Castellammare on July 24. The Germans had evacuated by mid-August; the 505th moved to Tunisia,

then back to Sicily on September 4 to prepare for the Italian mainland assault.

The 505th jumped into Salerno on the night of September 14, 1943 to reinforce the beachhead, and was placed in the south end of the line adjacent to the 504th. Colonel Gavin turned over command to LtCol Herbert F. Batchelor on October 3 when he became the assistant division commander. The reinforced 82nd attacked north to Naples, and on October 7 reached the Volturno river. The division was relieved in November and departed for Tunisia, arriving on the 22nd, then on to Northern Ireland, arriving December 9. It moved to England on February 14, 1944.

On June 6 the 505th was to jump on DZ O northwest of Ste Mère Eglise. It earned its nickname of "H-Minus" by jumping before H-Hour on D-Day. The regiment was scattered, but most sticks landed on or within 2 miles of the DZ, and Ste Mère Eglise was the first French town liberated. The 505th initially protected the rest of 82nd Abn Div from flank attacks; it then pushed across the Cotentin Peninsula for some weeks, finally being withdrawn to Britain on July 13.

The 505th's part in *Market-Garden* was to jump onto DZ N near Berg-en-Dal, Holland on September 17, 1944: 1st Bn was to defend to the southwest, 2nd Bn to act as division reserve, and 3rd Bn to seize Groesbeek. While slightly misdropped, the regiment assembled quickly and accomplished its missions, soon liberating Nijmegen. The 82nd Abn Div remained in the area until November 12, when it was relieved and moved to near Reims, France for rest.

When the German Ardennes offensive opened, the 504th was rushed north to Belgium on December 18. It attacked northeast and southeast in the Trois



Paratroopers of First Airborne Task Force take cover in a roadside ditch in the South of France, summer 1944. The man in the foreground has the M1 bayonet with 10in-blade adopted in 1943, though the 16in-blade M1905 was also seen throughout the war. The man beyond him has a blanket roll secured under the flap of his M1936 musette bag; each man was issued two wool blankets. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

Ponts area on the 20th, but was pulled back on the 24th. Placed in reserve, it attacked again on January 3, 1945 to establish a defense of the Salm river. It became XVIII Abn Corps reserve on January 10. On January 25 the 82nd Abn Div returned to the line and the 505th moved northeast; it went on the offensive on the 28th, fighting until February 19, when it returned to France.

On April 4, 1945 the “Five-Oh-Fivers” occupied a defense line on the Rhine until they assaulted across the river on April 30. It was in reserve from May 2 until the end of the war a week later. Most of the veterans returned home, while the division, filled out with fresh replacements, occupied Berlin. The 505th returned to the States in January 1946, to remain an active unit.

505th Parachute Infantry Regiment

505th PIR activated – July 6, 1942

assigned to Abn Cmd – July 6

assigned to 82nd Abn Div – Feb 10, 1943

arrived in Morocco – May 10

assaulted into Sicily – July 9

assaulted Salerno, Italy – Sept 14

assaulted into France – June 6, 1944

assaulted into Netherlands – Sept 17

redesignated 505th AIR – Dec 15, 1948

Awards:

PUC – Ste Mère Eglise; PUC – Nijmegen (2nd Bn); Meritorious Unit Citation; French Croix de Guerre w/Palm – Cotentin; French Croix de Guerre Fourragère; Netherlands Military Order of William – Nijmegen; Netherlands Orange Lanyard; Belgian Croix de Guerre w/Palm – Bastogne; Belgian Fourragère; Belgian Order of the Day – Ardennes; Belgian Order of the Day – Belgium & Germany

506th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT

Currahee (“Stands Alone”)

The 506th was activated on July 20, 1942 at Camp Toombs, GA (renamed Camp Toccoa on August 21). In December it moved to Ft Benning for jump training, and assignment to the Abn Cmd. Moving to Camp Mackall in February 1943, it was attached to the 101st Abn Div in June. After extensive

training there and at Sturgis Army Airfield and Ft Bragg, it departed Camp Shanks, NY for Britain, arriving to join the 101st Abn Div in September 1943. Its commander was Col Robert F. ("Bounding Bob") Sink, leading to it being called the "Five-Oh-Sink."

On June 6, 1944 most of the 506th missed its DZs A, C, and D, but nonetheless elements secured the two southernmost causeway exits from Utah Beach. They attacked southeastward, and the 506th later fought through Carentan. It continued to fight on the Cotentin Peninsula until June 29, being placed in First Army reserve until returning to Britain on July 10.

After rebuilding, the regiment jumped onto DZ A northeast of Son, Holland on September 17, to seize the Wilhelmina Canal bridges; it then took Eindhoven to the south, seizing the bridges over the Dommel river. The regiment cleared dozens of towns, and defended "The Island" into November. At the end of that month they were at Mourmelon, France for rebuilding.

The German Ardennes offensive saw the "Currahees" rushed to Bastogne on December 19, and they defended the northwest perimeter. US armor broke through to the garrison on December 26, but fighting continued. On January 6, 1945 the 506th attacked north, seizing several important towns through mid-January. It then remained in the defense until sent to Mourmelon, France on February 23 for rebuilding. It was assigned to 101st Abn Div on March 1, 1945. On April 2 it was sent against the Ruhr Pocket attached to the 4th Inf Div, entering Germany on the 4th. On May 4 it secured the Berchtesgaden area. After occupation duty the regiment was inactivated in Germany on September 16, 1945.

The regiment's motto, *Currahee*, "stands alone," is the Indian name of a mountain peak near Camp Toccoa. During training 506th personnel frequently had to run from the camp to the mountaintop and back again.

506th Parachute Infantry Regiment

506th PIR activated – July 20, 1942

assigned to Abn Cmd – Dec 15

attached to 101st Abn Div – June 1, 1943

arrived in UK – Sept 15

assaulted into France – June 6, 1944

assaulted into Netherlands – Sept 17

assigned to 101st Abn Div – March 1, 1945

506th PIR inactivated – Sept 16, 1945

Awards:

PUC – Normandy; PUC – Bastogne; French Croix de Guerre w/Palm – Normandy; Netherlands Orange Lanyard; Belgian Croix de Guerre w/Palm – Bastogne; Belgian Fourragère; Belgian Order of the Day – Bastogne; Belgian Order of the Day – France & Germany

507th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT

Down to Earth

The 507th PIR was activated at Ft Benning on July 20, 1942 and assigned to the Abn Cmd. Under Col George V. ("Zip") Millett, Jr, it undertook basic, parachute and airborne training. It underwent further training at Barksdale Army Airfield, LA in March, and then at Alliance Army Airfield, where it was assigned to the 1st Prcht Inf Bde on April 14, 1943. It departed Camp Starks in November, to arrive in Britain in mid-December. There it was attached to the 82nd Abn Div on January 14, 1944, replacing the 504th PIR left in Italy. It had ample training time before the Normandy operation.

On D-Day the regiment was to jump onto DZ T, the northwesternmost of the DZs. It was widely scattered, with many landing in the flooded area to the east, and it took days for the 507th to assemble as a fighting force. The 2/507th established a defense to the west on the Merderet river. Colonel Millett was captured on June 8, and his XO, LtCol Arthur A. Maloney, assumed command. Colonel Edson D. Raff, formerly of the 509th Prcht Inf Bn, had come ashore with the 82nd's sea-delivered Force C as the temporary division chief of staff, and he was given command of the 507th on June 15. The 507th fought at Ste Mère Eglise and elsewhere on the Cotentin Peninsula, finally returning to Britain on July 13. While rebuilding, it was attached to the 17th Abn Div on August 17 to provide it with a second PIR (much to the displeasure of the troops, who considered themselves as much a part of the 82nd as the assigned regiments). During *Market-Garden* the regiment remained in Britain as the 1st Allied Abn Army reserve.

Now known as "Raff's Ruffians," the regiment was unable to fly from its British training area to France at the outbreak of the Ardennes fighting owing to bad weather. It was flown to Reims on December 23–25, and the 17th Abn Div was attached to Third Army to counterattack the German offensive. The 17th moved to Morhet, Belgium and relieved the 28th Inf Div on January 3, 1945. The 507th PIR was held in case of a German counterattack. After the 17th cleared the west side of Bastogne, the 507th PIR attacked east across Luxembourg to the Our river. On February 10 the regiment returned to its base camp at Chalons sur Marne, France. On March 1, 1945 it was assigned to the 17th as its second PIR, and prepared for the Rhine crossing.

On March 24 the 507th jumped onto DZ W northwest of Wessel, Germany. On April 10 it captured Essen, and continued to clear the Ruhr while attached to XIX Corps, March 31 to April 4. With the war over the 507th conducted occupation duty until moved to France in mid-July. Filled with "high-point" veterans from other units, the regiment arrived in the States on September 15, 1945, and was inactivated at Camp Myles Standish, MA the next day.

507th Parachute Infantry Regiment

507th PIR activated – July 20, 1942

assigned to Abn Cmd – July 20

assigned to 1st Prcht Inf Bde – April 14, 1943

arrived in UK – Dec 16

attached 82nd Abn Div – Jan 14, 1944

assaulted into France – June 6

attached to 17th Abn Div – Aug 27

assigned to 17th Abn Div – March 1, 1945

assaulted into Germany – March 24

507th PIR inactivated – Sept 16, 1945

Awards:

PUC – Cotentin Peninsula; French Croix de Guerre w/Palm – Ste Mère Eglise; French Croix de Guerre w/Palm – Cotentin; French Croix de Guerre Fourragère

Medal of Honor: Pvt George J. Peters

508th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT

Fury From the Sky

The 508th PIR was activated at Camp Blanding, FL on October 20, 1942 and assigned to the Abn Cmd. After basic training it moved to Ft Benning for

A slightly injured 17th Abn Div NCO, Germany, March 1945. Since scattered paratroopers were often cut off from medical care, they carried first aid items not generally issued to ground troops. One of the most conspicuous was the parachute first aid packet (see Plate E9), an Army Air Forces item originally designed to be fastened to the parachute harness straps or life vests of air crewmen. Widely used by paratroopers (though not in the Southwest Pacific), it was often tied by two tapes to the helmet camouflage net (at front, side, or back); to an ankle; or to the left suspenders or low on the right, in order not to interfere with shouldering a weapon. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)



jump school, and then to Camp Mackall in March 1943, Col Roy E. Lindquist commanding. Passing through Camp Stakes, it arrived in Northern Ireland in January 1944. Attached to the 82nd Abn Div on January 14, it moved to England in mid-March.

The D-Day mission of the 508th, nicknamed the “Red Devils,” was to jump onto DZ N, the inland or westernmost DZ, to seize the Merderet river

E

517th & 551st PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENTS; SOUTHERN FRANCE, SEPTEMBER 1944

(1) BAR man, 517th PIR By now many parachute units had replaced some of their M1919A4 light machine guns with M1918A2 Browning Automatic Rifles. At 45lb with its tripod, plus heavy ammo cans for the belts, the LMG was too heavy and cumbersome for rapidly-maneuvering rifle squads; the 19.4lb BAR made the squad more agile, though platoons usually retained one LMG. The BAR's bipod was often discarded as needless extra weight.

The 517th PIR had a shortage of M2 parachutist's helmets, so riggers modified the M1 to accept parachutist's chinstraps. They also spray-painted helmets with camouflage after the nets had been fitted. After landing, many paratroopers cut a section from a canopy for a souvenir scarf. The jump uniform was sometimes modified with extra pockets on upper sleeves. Here this feature is partly obscured by the safety-pinned oilcloth brassard bearing the US flag, an alternative to sewing a flag patch to the uniform; like the rest of First Airborne Task Force, the 517th wore this on the left arm rather than the usual right. The M1937 BAR belt's six pockets held 12x 20-round magazines, but owing to their weight it was recommended only 8 be carried. His gear includes two canteens, a new OD M1942 first aid pouch, and an M3 knife in an M8 plastic scabbard hooked to the belt.

(2) Lieutenant, 1/551st PIR This officer from one of two separate parachute battalions in the FATF is depicted in a rear area. He wears the OD wool service uniform with a garrison cap, and the A-2 leather flight jacket authorized for officers

(though not in forward areas), with the 551st's patch on the left chest. Like the use of Corcoran jump boots with service dress, another of the paratroopers' distinctions from other infantry was the wearing of the garrison cap even with field uniform. Officer status is shown by mixed gold-and-black piping on the flap edges, and his rank on the left front displaces the parachute patch to the right front. In shirtsleeve order under the flight jacket, he would be displaying the rank bar on his right collar and the Infantry crossed rifles with “551” on his left.

(3) & (4) Pocket patches, 517th & 551st PIR respectively.

(5) Parachute patch, worn by all ranks of parachute units on the garrison cap.

(6) From August 1944 this combined cap patch replaced the separate parachute and glider patches worn previously.

(7) SCR-536 “handie-talkie” radio, issued on a scale of one per platoon, two in company HQ, and three spares. This web carrier was clipped to the parachute harness for the jump.

(8) M1A1 antitank mine; measuring 8in across and weighing 10.8lb, this could be carried on the jump in a musette or a leg bag.

(9) The parachute first aid packet; some men carried two, one on the helmet and one on an ankle or the suspenders. The sealed waterproof fabric container was opened by tearing off either end. Early kits contained a small field dressing, tourniquet, and morphine syrette. In early 1944 a pack of eight sulfa tablets (“Wound Tablets”), five sulfa powder envelopes, and an instruction sheet were added. The sulfa powder was soon deleted, and this buckle-type tourniquet was replaced with an elastic type.



crossings. Most landed to the south and east, even east of the river; it was four days before the regiment fully assembled, and it suffered 50 percent casualties. It was shifted around during the days that followed – to Baupre, Vinde-Fonraine, and La Haye de Puits – and returned to Britain in mid-July.

For *Market-Garden* on September 17 the 508th jumped into DZ T near Groesbeek to establish a lengthy defense line south of Nijmegen. For over two weeks it fought in the Groesbeek area, then crossed the Waal river and established a defensive line, not being pulled back to France for rest until November 11.

With the rest of the 82nd Abn Div, the regiment was rushed into Belgium on December 18 to stem the German Ardennes offensive. The next day it moved to Goronne and held open an escape corridor on the Salm river for withdrawing units. Pulled back to Basse Bodeux five days later, it fought off German advances before again advancing to the Salm. Withdrawn from the line on 21 January 1945, it moved to Deidenberg. Returning to the Salm three days later, it advanced until it reached the German border in early February. On February 4 it was pulled back to Rencheux for a brief rest; back on the front line on the 7th, it fought its way to the Roer river, before returning to France on February 18.

On April 4, 1945 the 508th was withdrawn from the 82nd Abn Div and attached to 1st Allied Abn Army, being sent to the Paris area ready to be dropped in the event atrocities were committed against Allied prisoners of war. After the war's end it moved to Frankfurt in June to guard Gen Eisenhower's headquarters. Command passed to LtCol Otho Holmes in December 1945. The 508th was the last remaining US parachute regiment in Europe at the time of its return home in November 1946; it was inactivated at Camp Kilmer, NJ on November 25.

A medical detachment prepare to board a C-47, wearing the M1943 uniform that replaced the 1942 jumpsuit before the Netherlands assaults in September 1944 (see Plate F). A variety of medical kits can be seen, and the fourth man from the right carries an M1944 leg bag on his back. Two A-5 airdrop containers lie on the ground; accommodating crew-served weapons, ammo, demolitions, or medical supplies, these were attached to two pairs of bomb shackles beneath the wings and fuselage, and were released on 24ft G-1 cargo parachutes at the same time the paratroopers exited. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)



508th Parachute Infantry Regiment

508th PIR activated – Oct 20, 1942

assigned to Abn Cmd – Oct 20

arrived in Northern Ireland – Jan 8, 1944

attached to 82nd Abn Div – Jan 14

assaulted into France – June 6

assaulted into Netherlands – Sept 17

508th PIR inactivated – Nov 25, 1946

Awards:

PUC – Cotentin Peninsula; French Croix de Guerre w/Palm – Ste Mère Eglise; French Croix de Guerre w/Palm – Cotentin; French Croix de Guerre Fourragère; Netherlands Military Order of William – Nijmegen; Netherlands Orange Lanyard; Belgian Croix de Guerre w/Palm – Bastogne; Belgian Fourragère; Belgian Order of the Day – St Vith; Belgian Order of the Day – Belgium & Germany

Medal of Honor: 1st Sgt Leonard A. Funk, Jr

509th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT/BATTALION

All the Way

The original 2/503rd PIR arrived in Britain in June 1942 under LtCol Edson D. Raff. Attached to the British 1st Prcht Bde, it prepared for the invasion of French North Africa, where it would make the first three US combat jumps. It was redesignated 2/509th PIR on November 2. The first jump on November 8 was disastrous, with troops misdropped far from their La Senia objective. Part of the battalion jumped in at Youls les Bains airfield and secured Tebessa. A platoon-sized raid to blow a bridge jumped in near El Djem, Tunisia on December 24, but failed. The battalion operated the Fifth Army Airborne Training Center in Morocco. In March 1943 Maj Doyle R. Yardley took command. The same month, in addition to the usual battalion structure, the 2/509th formed a Provisional Scout Co; redesignated Provisional Co G in December 1943, it would be disbanded in March 1944.

Attached to the 82nd Abn Div on July 9, 1943, the battalion had a difficult time integrating into it, and was held in reserve during the Sicily campaign. To reinforce the Salerno landing the 82nd jumped in two regiments (504th & 505th) on September 13 and 14. In advance of the operation, 50 men from the 509th landed on Ventotene Island on September 8–9 and fooled the German commander into surrendering a radar station. The 2/509th jumped near Avellino 20 miles north of Salerno as a divisionary raid on September 14–15; very widely scattered, it took weeks for them to return to friendly lines, having accomplished little. On September 28 LtCol William P. Yarborough took command; in November and December 1943 the unit was attached to the 6615th Ranger Force, and saw ground combat.

Since the rest of the regiment was never activated, the unit was redesignated 509th Prcht Inf Bn on December 10, 1943. For the Anzio assault on January 22, 1944 the 509th PIB was again attached to the Ranger Force, and made an amphibious landing. Seeing extensive ground action into May, it received the first Medal of Honor and first Presidential Unit Citation granted to a parachute unit.

In July 1944 the 509th was attached to the First Abn Task Force (FATF), a provisional Allied airborne division formed for the invasion of southern France. The 509th would lead the airborne phase of Operation *Dragoon* on August 15, jumping onto DZ C near Le Muy. After the area was secured the



LtGen Walter Krueger, commanding Sixth Army, speaks with a 511th PIR paratrooper before the Luzon jump of February 1945. The soldier is in the middle of donning his T-7 parachute, and hanging below the backpack is the belly band attached to the right side of it. This will be brought up around his right side, threaded through loops on the rear of the reserve pack, then fastened to a buckle on the left side of the backpack. The reserve was also secured by two heavy-duty snap hooks clipping to D-rings on the harness. The backpack is olive drab, but the harness straps and the 15ft static line are white; OD harnesses began to appear only at the end of in the war. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

509th and the rest of FATF advanced east along the coast, and then conducted patrols in the Alps for three months. Major Edmund J. Tomasik took command on October 14, 1944.

Assigned to the 101st Abn Div in November, the battalion moved to northern France in mid-December. Attached to the 3rd Armd Div, it was rushed to the “Bulge” on December 22, and committed to battle piecemeal. The CO on his own volition committed the survivors to hold out against overwhelming Waffen-SS units at Sadzot on December 28–29; they held, and then counterattacked. Attached to 7th Armd Div on January 12, 1945, they took part in bitter fighting around St Vith and Born. Having suffered 680 casualties from a starting strength of 745, and with the rifle strength reduced to a single platoon, the 509th was pulled out and the survivors were reassigned to the 505th PIR. The 509th was formally inactivated on March 1, 1945.

509th Parachute Infantry Regiment/Battalion

2/509th PIR redesignated (from 2/503rd PIR) – Nov 2, 1942

assaulted into Algeria – Nov 7 & 15

attached to 82nd Abn Div – July 9, 1943

assaulted into Italy – Sept 14

redesignated 509th Prcht Inf Bn – Dec 10

assaulted into South of France – Aug 15, 1944

assigned to 101st Abn Div – Nov 18

detached from 101st Abn Div – Dec 18

509th Prcht Inf Bn inactivated – March 1, 1945

Awards:

PUC – Carano, Italy (Co C); PUC – Liège, Belgium; French Croix de Guerre w/Silver Star – Muy en Provence; Belgian Order of the Day – Ardennes; Belgian Order of the Day – St Vith; Honorary crest of French 3^e Rég^t de Zouaves

Medal of Honor: Cpl Paul B. Huff (first paratrooper to receive MoH)

511th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT

Strength From Above

The 511th PIR was activated at Camp Toccoa on January 5, 1943 and assigned to the Abn Cmd. Under the command of Col Orin D. Haugen, it moved to Camp Mackall and joined the 11th Abn Div on February 25. It undertook parachute training at Ft Benning in May–June, and from Camp Mackall it relocated to Camp Polk, LA in January 1944 for further training. It moved to Camp Stoneman, CA in April, to depart for the Pacific Theater the next month. Arriving in New Guinea at the end of May, it conducted further training.

On November 18, 1944 it arrived on Leyte in the Philippines almost a month after the initial landings, and went into the line in the rugged central mountains. Under brutal conditions, it pushed westwards across the island, establishing remote bases. Over 250 individuals jumped in from single-engine liaison aircraft as guides, replacements, reinforcements, and command and



11th Abn Div litter-bearers bring in a casualty; they wear regular OD herringbone twill fatigues rather than tan jumpsuits, which were too conspicuous for the jungle. The man at the left wears a "Swing cap," and has adapted a length of web machine-gun feed belt as a carbine sling, filling its loops with carbine rounds. The soldier on the right carries two rifle bandoleers each holding 48 rounds; just visible are two 8-rd en bloc clips for the Garand jammed on the edge for instant use. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

support personnel. On December 5 the Japanese attempted a parachute, amphibious, and overland attack, which met with defeat. On Christmas Day the paratroopers finally reached the island's west coast, where the Japanese had been landing reinforcements. In the middle of January 1945 the 11th Abn Div assembled, and the 511th was moved to Mindoro to prepare for a jump on Luzon, getting little rest and no replacements.

The rest of the division landed amphibiously on January 31, 1945; on February 2–3 the weary 511th parachuted onto Tagaytay Ridge, 55 miles southwest of Manila, in three lifts. Soon linking up with the glider troops arriving from the beachhead, they advanced toward Manila, which they reached on February 4. There followed prolonged and brutal street-fighting against well dug-in defenders. The regiment took Nichols Field and Ft McKinley; Col Haugen was wounded on February 11 (to die on the 22nd), and LtCol Edward H. Lathi took over command. The mission was completed on February 24, at the cost of heavy losses.

While this battle was under way 1/511th had been detached, and conducted a spectacular parachute (Co B) and amphibious raid to liberate 2,150 civilians from the Los Baños internment camp on February 23.⁵

The 11th Abn Div went on to clear southern Luzon. On March 17 the 511th was placed in Sixth Army reserve; back in action on April 12, it fought on until May 3. In May and June replacements were received and the unit retrained and reorganized. It was called on for one final mission, the last airborne operation of World War II. The reinforced 1/511th jumped at Camalaniugan (aka Apatti) in northern Luzon in support of the 37th Inf Div drive to cut off retreating Japanese.

Returning to its base at the end of July, the division was airlifted to

5 See Osprey Raid 3, *The Los Baños Prison Camp Raid*

Okinawa in mid-August. On August 30 the 511th air-landed at Atsugi Airbase southwest of Tokyo and occupied Yokohama; it was the first large US formation to enter Japan. It remained in occupation until May 1949, when it deployed to Ft Campbell, KY. As the 511th Abn Inf Regt it deployed to West Germany in 1956, and was inactivated there on March 1, 1957.

511th Parachute Infantry Regiment

511th PIR activated – Jan 5, 1943

assigned to Abn Cmd – Jan 5

assigned to 11th Abn Div – Feb 25

arrived New Guinea – May 29, 1944

arrived Leyte, Philippines – Nov 18

assaulted Luzon Island – Feb 2–3, 1945

assaulted Camalaniugan (1st Bn) – June 23,

redesignated 511th AIR – June 30, 1949

511th AIR inactivated – March 1, 1957

Awards:

PUC – Manila; PUC – Los Baños (Co B); Philippine PUC – Oct 17, 1944 to July 4, 1945

Medals of Honor: Pvt Elmer E. Fryar; Pfc Manuel Perez, Jr

A paratrooper in Germany following Operation *Varsity*. The hung-up parachute canopy is speckled with medium and dark green on a light tan/green base; from a distance this camouflage appeared solid light olive drab. White training parachutes were also sometimes seen in combat. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

513th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT

(No motto)

The 513th PIR was activated at Ft Benning on January 11, 1943 and assigned to the 13th Abn Div, which was not activated until August 13. Commanded by Col Albert H. Dickerson, it undertook jump school in October, moved to Ft Bragg on November 1, and in January 1944 to Camp Mackall, where Col James W. Coutts took command. On March 4 it was relieved from the 13th Abn Div (replaced by 515th PIR) and reassigned to the 17th Abn Div (to replace the 517th PIR). The reason for this shifting of units was comparative readiness; the 17th was the next airborne division destined for Europe. The 513th moved to Camp Forrest, TN in March, and then to Camp Myles Standish in August, landing in Britain at the end of that month.

Held in reserve during *Market-Garden*, the 513th was rush-airlifted to Reims, France in response to the Ardennes crisis on December 23–25, 1944. The division was attached to the counterattacking Third Army, and established a defense on the Meuse river near Verdun. It moved into Belgium to relieve the 28th Inf Div on January 3, 1945. Directed to seize Flamierge, it did so at a high cost. The regiment alternately attacked and defended against superior forces until pulled back to Chalons sur Marne on February 11. On March 21 it moved back into Belgium to prepare for the Rhine crossings, Operation *Varsity*, on March 24.

This would be the final divisional airborne assault in World War II. Experiencing heavy flak and misdropped near Hamminkeln, Germany, the regiment met heavy resistance, but it landed near the intended DZ X, and secured all its objectives that afternoon. The 513th pushed further into Germany, and the beginning of April found it fighting through Munster. Colonel Coutts was wounded





Paratroopers cautiously check out a patch of woodland outside Munster, Germany. The number of M1A1 carbines being carried suggests that they are from a support unit rather than a rifle squad, which would carry mainly Garands. Carbine-armed paratroopers were authorized four two-magazine pouches for a total of 120 rounds; many also carried a 50-rd carton in a pocket or their musette bag. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

on April 9 and replaced by LtCol Ward Ryan. The regiment was pulled out of the line on April 25.

From May to July the division performed occupation duty, and LtCol David P. Schorr took command. It moved to France in August, before returning to the States on September 14, 1945, to be inactivated at Camp Myles Standish the same day.

513th Parachute Infantry Regiment

513th PIR activated – Jan 11, 1943

assigned to 13th Abn Div – Jan 11

assigned to 17th Abn Div – March 10, 1944

arrived in UK – Aug 28

assaulted into Germany – March 24, 1945

513th PIR inactivated – Sept 14

Awards:

PUC – Wessel, Germany (1st & 2nd Bns); PUC – Wessel, Germany (3rd Bn)
Medals of Honor: SSgt Isadore S. Jachman; Pfc Stuart S. Stryker

517th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT/ REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

Attack

The 517th PIR was activated on March 15, 1943 at Camp Toccoa and assigned to the Abn Cmd, under LtCol Louis A. Walsh, Jr. It was assigned to the 17th Abn Div on April 15, moved to Camp Mackall in August, and thence to Ft Benning for jump school (where not a single man “washed out” – a record never broken). Relieved from the division on March 10, 1944, it was reorganized as a Prcht Regimental Combat Team along with the 460th PFAB and Co C (Prcht), 139th Abn Engr Bn; the latter was soon redesignated 596th Abn Engr Co (Prcht). It arrived in Italy in May, with Col Rupert D. Graves now commanding, to replace the 504th PRCT which had departed for Britain.



Men from 101st Abn Div towing a two-wheeled M3 handcart. Eight of these were a parachute infantry battalion's only organic vehicles, used to transport munitions, radio equipment, and medical supplies. Both left and right men carry German souvenirs and weapons – respectively, an officer's cap and a Kar 98k rifle, and Stg 24 stick grenades. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

The PRCT saw combat in Italy north of Rome during June 18–26, attached to the 36th Inf Div, and was then placed in IV Corps reserve. On July 8 it was assigned to the First Abn Task Force for the invasion of southern France. On August 15 the regiment was dropped outside Le Muy on DZ A, in the order 2nd, 3rd, and 1st Battalions. They fanned out in an arch west of Le Muy, with elements attacking south to block German advances. After relieving the 3rd Inf Div, the 517th advanced east inland from the coast until November 17, to protect Seventh Army's flank.

On November 22, 1944 the 517th was attached to XVIII Abn Corps, moving to northern France in early December. Maintained as a separate unit, the 517th PRCT was attached to a succession of formations during the "Battle of the Bulge": 30th Inf Div (December 17–27); 7th Armd Div (December 28–29); 106th Inf Div (January 11–17 1945); 82nd Abn Div (January 23–26 & February 3–4); 78th Inf Div (February 4–7); 82nd Abn Div (February 9–10), and 13th Abn Div (February 11–March 1).

On March 1 it was assigned to the 13th Abn Div as its second RCT, alongside the 515th. Several airborne operations were planned, but 13th Abn Div saw no combat, though it did provide replacements to the depleted 17th, 82nd, and 101st Abn Divisions. The 517th returned to the States in August

F

508th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT; NETHERLANDS, SEPTEMBER 17, 1944

(1) & (2) Mortar crewmen, 2/508th PIR, Operation Market-Garden These troopers, in action near Groesbeek, wear the M1943 field uniform that replaced the jumpsuit in parachute units from mid-1944 (other units had to wait longer for it). It was intended for cool-weather and winter wear over the wool uniform. Parachute units added large cargo pockets and tie-tapes to the legs, a feature that was soon formally adopted. While the M1943 became general wear, especially for new replacements reaching the units, experienced troopers kept their old jumpsuits, and often donned them when making jumps. For *Market-Garden* the flag patch was worn on the right sleeve and the 82nd Abn Div patch on the left shoulder. Note also the M1944 "double buckle" combat boots worn instead of Corcorans.

The mortar gunner of the "Red Devils" has taken off his M1C helmet and wears the M1941 knit "jeep cap" that was intended to be worn underneath it (many officers, prohibited from wearing it themselves, despised its slovenly appearance). Both troopers have the leather chin cup on their helmet straps, and under the small-mesh net they display on both sides the two white lightning flashes of 2/508th. The HHC wore a red "HH" or single flash; 1st Bn, a red fireball; and 3rd Bn, a winged foot – either blue or black outlined in white, or all white.

The platoon's six-man mortar squad could also serve as riflemen, or operate spare LMGs and/or bazookas. Ordinary mortar squad members were originally issued M1 rifles; the Garands were soon replaced with these M1A1 carbines, though many men preferred to retain the rifle. The mortar squad would maneuver to the rear of the rifle squads under the platoon sergeant, to provide immediate fire; since paratroopers were initially without artillery support following a jump, the 60mm M2 mortar was, at 42lb weight, a valuable man-portable asset. Its official minimum range was 100 yards

and the maximum 1,985 yards, with a sustained rate of fire of 18 rounds per minute. In fact, it could pop out 32 to 35rpm in an emergency, and bring fire down as close as 30 yards from friendly positions. Both high explosive and illumination rounds were available, and white phosphorus smoke from 1944, but – as always for paratroopers – adequate resupply was often a problem. (Mortars were deleted from the T/O&E on September 13, 1945, and replaced by a 17-man company assault section with three 57mm M18 recoilless rifles.)

(3) Pocket patch, 508th PIR, diameter 3¾in

(4) AN-M14 thermite incendiary grenade

(5) M15 white phosphorus grenade

(6) The 22lb M37 demolition kit contained 8x 2½lb M1 tetrytol blocks linked together with detcord, or M2 blocks without detcord.

(7) The Individual Demolition Equipment Set No. 5 provided paratroopers with the means to carry out non-electric demolition projects, and was used for breaching obstacles, destroying small fortifications, and fabricating simple booby traps. It consisted of:

(7a) 2x demolition equipment carrying bags

(7b) 32x 2¼lb blocks of C2 or C3 plastic explosive (2 cases)

(7c) 10x M2 weatherproof fuse lighters

(7d) 5x M1A1 pressure-type firing devices

(7e) 50x M1 detonating cord clips

(7f) 10x M2 friction-pull firing devices

(7g) 20x M1A1/A2/A3/A4 explosive priming adapters

(7h) 2x 100ft spools of detonating cord

(7i) 2x 25ft coils of time fuse

(7j) 2x M2 cap-crimpers with fuse-cutter

(7k) 2x 8oz rolls of ¼in black friction tape

(7l) 2x ½lb cans of M1 adhesive paste

(7m) 50x J1 non-electric special blasting caps (detonators)

(7n) 10x M1 15-second delay igniters

(7o) 2x 10-cap capacity boxes for blasting caps



Troops from 17th Abn Div in Germany after the Rhine crossings, some wearing the large ground/air recognition scarves used during ground operations. In pale yellow or white, these were displayed by designated men to mark the front line trace, in hope of avoiding attack by Allied aircraft. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)



1945, and was stationed at Ft Bragg to out-process paratroopers. The regiment was inactivated on February 25, 1946.

517th Parachute Infantry Regiment

517th PIR activated – March 15, 1943

assigned to Abn Cmd – March 15

assigned to 17th Abn Div – Apr 15

relieved from 17th Abn Div – March 10, 1944

to 517th PRCT – March

arrived in Italy – May 28

attached to First Abn Task Force – July 15 to Nov 23

assaulted into France – Aug 15

attached to numerous formations – Dec 1944 to Feb 1945

attached to 13th Abn Div – Feb 11, 1945

assigned to 13th Abn Div – March 1

517th PIR inactivated – Feb 25, 1946

Awards:

PUC – Soy-Hotton, Belgium (1st Bn); French Croix de Guerre w/Gold Star – Dranguignan; Belgian Order of the Day – Ardennes; Belgian Croix de Guerre (517th PIR); Belgian Croix de Guerre (1st Bn); Belgian Croix de Guerre (2nd Bn)

Medal of Honor: Pfc Melvin E. Biddle

551st PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT

Aterrice y Ataque (“Land and Attack”)

The regiment’s 1st Bn was activated on November 26, 1942 at Ft Kobbe, Panama Canal Zone under LtCol Wood G. Joerg; this would remain the only element of the regiment to be activated. The phrase “Get off your ass!” was used so much that they became known as the “GOYA Birds.” Unlike 2/509th PIR which became the 509th PIB, the unit was not redesignated the 551st PIB, although it is commonly referred to as such.

The battalion was on standby to assault the Caribbean island of Martinique, a colony of Vichy France. After the island surrendered to the Allies the battalion was shipped in August 1943 to Camp Mackall, where

they trained until March 1944. From October 1943 LtCol Rupert D. Graves took command, but LtCol Joerg returned in March 1944.

Arriving in Italy in May, it prepared for the South of France invasion. On August 15 the battalion made the first US daylight combat jump in Europe, landing tightly on DZ A northwest of Le Muy before attacking to the northwest. Thereafter the battalion saw continuous combat until November 17 as it advanced east along the coast.

On December 21, 1944 the 1/551st PIR moved to Belgium with a strength of 839 all ranks. It was subsequently attached to the 30th Inf Div, 517th PIR, and 504th PIR as it fought through the Ardennes. On January 7, 1945 LtCol Joerg protested orders to attack RochelINVAL with his remaining 250 men, over open ground and without artillery support, but he was overruled. That same day Joerg was killed, and Maj William N. Holm took over. Two days later only 110 men remained; the unit was pulled out of the line on January 9, and on the 27th the survivors were reassigned to 82nd Abn Div units. The 1/551st was formally inactivated on February 10, 1945.

1/551st Parachute Infantry Regiment

1st Bn activated – Nov 26, 1942 (regiment never activated)

arrived in Italy – May 23, 1944

attached to First Abn Task Force – July 15

assaulted into S. France – Aug 15

attached to 82nd Abn Div – Dec 26

1/551st PIR inactivated – Feb 10, 1945

Awards:

PUC – RochelINVAL (awarded only in 2002); French Croix de Guerre w/Star – Draguignan

Note the dark brown felt pads, 10in x 3in x $\frac{3}{8}$ in thick, that many paratroopers added to their M1936 suspenders to prevent chafing on the shoulders; see Plate G1. This man also wears a cotton field cap with integral earflaps under his helmet, as intended in the design. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

OTHER REGIMENTS

Four PIRs never saw combat under that designation, and of these regiments one did not deploy overseas.

188th Parachute Infantry Regiment

Winged Attack

The 188th Glider Inf Regt was activated at Camp Mackall on February 25, 1943 and was assigned to the 11th Abn Div. It arrived in New Guinea on June 11, 1944, and subsequently fought on Leyte and Luzon. When the division was reorganized in March 1945 the 188th was converted, and on July 20 it was redesignated 188th PIR, with Col Norman E. Tipton taking command. Some personnel were already parachute-qualified, as the division had striven to make all three regiments parachute-capable. The 188th was filled out by paratroopers from the 541st PIR, but saw no further combat. After occupation duty in Japan it moved to Ft Campbell, KY. Redesignated the 188th Abn Inf Regt on June 30, 1949, it was inactivated on March 1, 1957. (Note – neither of the 11th Abn Div's GIRs ever conducted a glider operation.)



Awards:

PUC – Nasugbu Point (HHC, 1st & 2nd Bn); Philippine PUC – Oct 17, 1944 to July 4, 1945

515th Parachute Infantry Regiment

Jumping Wolves

This regiment, which saw no combat, was activated at Ft Benning on May 31, 1943 and assigned to the Abn Cmd, under Col Julian B. Lindsay. It initially processed jump-school students and provided replacements to overseas units. It moved to Camp Mackall in January 1944, and was assigned to the 13th Abn Div on March 10, replacing the 513th. The regiment trained for overseas deployment until moved to Camp Sparks in January 1945. On February 6 it arrived in France, where Col Harvey J. Jablonsky took command. It was held in strategic reserve, providing replacements to the heavily engaged 17th, 82nd, and 101st Abn Divisions. The “Wolves” returned to the States in August 1945, and out-processed discharged paratroopers from other divisions until inactivated on February 25, 1946.

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501st & 506th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENTS; BASTOGNE, BELGIUM, DECEMBER 1944

The defense of Bastogne by the 101st Abn Div is legendary. Most of the 101st, together with the 82nd and 17th Abn Divs, were on leave or standing down when the German Ardennes offensive broke, and XVIII Abn Corps rushed them to Belgium. With elements of the 10th Armd Div, the 101st were cut off in Bastogne, unable to be air-supplied from December 20 to 27. They were not fully outfitted with winter clothing, and were short of ammunition (little had been available in their rest areas). Temperatures ranged from 14° down to -4° F (-10° to -20° C) before adding the wind-chill factor.

(1) Assistant squad leader, 506th PIR He wears an M1 helmet stenciled with the 506th's assembly marker, a spade symbol, over a jeep cap. Typically, the paratroopers wore long wool underwear; OD wool shirt and trousers or HBT fatigues (sometimes, both); M1943 field jacket and trousers; M1944 combat boots or Corcorans; and wool gloves with leather palms. Many were able to add a wool highneck sweater or a sweater sent from home, or a short “M1941” Parsons field jacket. Shoe-pacs – waterproofed boots for cold/wet weather below -10° F – were not available, but this trooper has managed to acquire a pair of the scarce arctic overshoes. At the end of the siege this British hooded snow camouflage smock was issued, along with matching trousers (not illustrated). This seasoned soldier has a mix of old tan and new OD web items; in the 506th especially, men often added thick felt pads to the M1936 suspenders. He is armed with the .45cal M3 SMG, and has a triple pouch for its 30-round magazines. Many paratroopers were issued a TL-122B flashlight with angled head; these could be attached to stakes to mark cleared minefield lanes or bypass routes.

(2) Rifleman, 501st PIR This regiment used a diamond helmet marker (and the 502nd, a heart). Wool overcoats or even M1938 raincoats were worn over the uniform for extra protection, and if nothing else was available some soldiers

simply draped an M1934 wool blanket around their shoulders. He has M1944 combat boots, and has strapped an M3 trench knife to his left ankle. His M1936 pistol belt has four of the new two-section pockets for both rifle and carbine ammunition; the web gear is OD apart from the carrier for the M1910 pick-mattock. He protects the muzzle of his M1 Garand rifle with a snap-strap web cover, and has jammed a clip of ammo onto the sling for immediate reloading.

(3) The windproof Dunhill trench lighter was nearly as popular as the more famous Zippo.

(4) The small liquid-filled wrist compass had a Bakelite case, and a narrow leather or OD web wristband with a metal buckle and with or without a retaining loop. It was issued to those paratroopers who were not issued the larger lensatic compass, to help them re-assemble after a scattered jump.

(5) & (6) Pocket patches, 501st and 506th PIR respectively.

(7) The British M1944 leg bag was used to jump ammunition, demolitions, mines, communications equipment, medical supplies, and other gear; it was 30in tall by 14in, with felt padding in the bottom. It hooked to the parachute harness and had a pair of loose right-leg straps for use when boarding, moving in the aircraft, and jumping. As soon as the canopy opened the trooper had to release the bag and lower it on the 20ft rope stowed in the long outside pocket, with the aid of a web hand loop.

(8) The M18 smoke grenade replaced the M16 in late 1943, though stocks of the latter remained in use. It burned only red, yellow, green, and violet, but generated a faster cloud of more vivid shades than the M16.

(9) The new 1944 pocket accommodated either two 8-round rifle clips or two 15-round carbine magazines. The bottom eyelets for hooking on other web items are the quickest distinguishing feature from the old carbine pocket.

(10) M5-11-7 assault gas mask and its M7 rubberized case. It could be worn on the chest for quick donning, but was more often worn on the left side (if not simply discarded).



Paratroopers of the 82nd Abn Div hitch a ride on an M4 Sherman tank in Belgium. The division deployed to the threatened Ardennes sector without enough ammunition or adequate winter clothing. Some of these soldiers wear expedient snow camouflage, while others have the snow-suits that were made available from British stocks. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)



OPPOSITE TOP

This paratrooper preparing for a training jump in 1943 carries an M1A1 carbine behind his reserve parachute; the sling would be threaded through the pack's belly band to ensure it didn't get lost, but in this position the carbine could easily give the jumper a smack in the face when he landed. The item below the reserve is a folded AN6505-1 aviator's kit bag, used after training jumps to carry the parachute off the DZ. These were not carried on tactical jumps, when the 'chutes would be discarded on the DZ for later recovery. Note at his right hip the 33ft-long skein of $\frac{3}{8}$ in diameter white cotton "parachutist's rope"; if the jumper got hung up in a tree he could tie it to his harness or to a limb and lower himself to the ground. It was also used for general utility purposes, commonly as a clothesline. In 1944 the design was modified to a looser-plaited $\frac{5}{8}$ in diameter rope; the first type was judged too thin and slippery for a firm grip. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

541st Parachute Infantry Regiment

(No motto)

Activated at Ft Benning under the Abn Cmd on August 12, 1943, it trained to a high level, but the troopers were sent to Britain as replacements and fillers for the 82nd and 101st Abn Divs in 1944. Under Col Ducat M. McEntee, it was rebuilt and sent to Luzon, Philippines in July 1945. Rather than being assigned to the 11th Abn Div as its second PIR, on August 10 it was broken up and used to fill the division's 187th GIR, 188th and 511th PIRs. While this was a great disappointment to the troops, it made sense to integrate the green personnel into experienced regiments that were about to be committed to Japan. It was formally inactivated on February 25, 1946.

542nd Parachute Infantry Regiment/ Battalion

(No motto)

The 542nd PIR was activated at Ft Benning on September 1, 1943 under LtCol William T. ("Bill") Ryder, the former commander of the original Parachute Test Platoon. Assigned to Abn Cmd, it was earmarked for Europe, but in early 1944 it began sending replacements to the 11th, 82nd, and 101st Abn Divisions. Rather than rebuild the unit, the regiment was inactivated. Its remaining 3rd Bn was transferred on February 29 to Replacement & School Cmd to process replacements, and redesignated the 542nd PIB on March 17. The battalion was inactivated on July 1, 1945.

FIELD EQUIPMENT

For the most part paratroopers used the same individual field equipment as standard infantrymen, but there were some minor differences in allocation and use, as well as some specialized items. They did carry a lot more gear and munitions, since they could expect to be on their own and without resupply for some unknown time – in many instances, more than a week.

One of the most notable differences was that paratroopers (and glider-men) were issued the M1936 field bag or “musette” with M1936 suspenders rather than the infantryman’s cumbersome and impractical M1928 haversack. It was not uncommon for them to add thick felt or sheepskin padding to the suspenders. How paratroopers carried ammunition also differed from standard infantry.

All paratroopers within the regiment except cooks and medical personnel were authorized a .45cal M1911A1 pistol. This was officially rescinded in February 1944, but even in Normandy and later many paratroopers still had them. Paratroopers armed with carbines and submachine guns used the M1936 pistol belt, to which the pistol’s two-magazine pocket and holster attached easily. However, rifle-armed troops used the ten-pocket M1923 dismantled cartridge belt (holding ten eight-round M1 clips or 20 five-round M1903 clips), and this had no means of attaching the pistol magazine pocket. Some units were issued M1923 mounted cartridge belts intended for pistol- and rifle-armed cavalymen; the left front pocket was deleted and the pistol magazine pouch attached by a snap. Some men simply cut off the left front pocket of the dismantled belt and slipped on the pistol magazine pocket; others carried spare magazines in trousers or jacket pockets. M3 shoulder holsters were also popular.

Many units rejected the M1923 cartridge belt and used the pistol belt fitted with two to four “rifle clip holders” procured through Army Air Forces channels. These were fat, rectangular pouches holding four M1 rifle en bloc clips, two 15-round carbine magazines and a 50-rd carton, or seven M1903 rifle stripper clips. Carbine-armed paratroopers were authorized 4x two-magazine pockets on the pistol belt, double the issue to standard infantrymen.



FATF paratroopers in southern France, where the US flag patch was worn on the left shoulder. The left-hand man has an M1943 folding entrenching tool on his right hip, and an M3 knife on his right ankle. The second man is armed with an M1903 rifle. The third man carries both an M1918A2 BAR slung on his left shoulder and an M1A1 carbine on his right, and wears the M1937 BAR belt. The medic on the right carries a pair of medical bags with their leg straps loosely fastened. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)



A fully loaded paratrooper pulling himself aboard a C-47 in England in 1944; the load was so heavy that men routinely needed a helping tug from the jumpmaster and/or a shove from a buddy behind in order to get up the steps. His M1 Thompson SMG, with a 20-rd magazine fitted, is thrust under the belly band of the T-5 parachute harness. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

In August 1944 the M1923 cartridge belt was replaced by the pistol belt with four of the new two-section carbine/rifle pockets; these were preferred, because unlike those on the M1923 the pockets could be repositioned to best accommodate the parachute harness straps.

Regardless of what equipment was carried on a paratrooper (and it was a considerable quantity), it was essential that it be securely fastened for the jump. Leaping into a 110mph (180km/h) air stream, coming to a sudden near-halt when the canopy opened, crashing through trees, and rolling on the ground could all too easily mean the loss or damage of essential equipment.

There was no “typical” load for a paratrooper; it varied greatly depending on the unit, date, region, climate, mission, individual duties and preferences, and the types of weapons carried. The following is a list of a rifleman’s load during the Normandy jump, but there was no standard location for wearing/carrying most items; it was up to the individual to position them where he could fit them.

Parachute rifleman’s load, June 1944

Item	
M2 steel helmet & liner w/camouflage net	on head
.30cal M1 Garand rifle w/M1907 sling	right side, in Griswold container
.45cal M1911A1 pistol w/M1916 holster	right side of belt
No. 75 “Hawkins” AT grenade-mine	ammunition carrying bag
No. 82 “Gammon” AT grenade	ammunition carrying bag
4x Mk IIA1 fragmentation grenades	trousers pockets
1x M16 orange smoke grenade	ammunition carrying bag
M1936 pistol belt	on person – waist
M1936 suspenders	on person – torso
4x rifle clip holders w/16x 8-rd clips	left & right front of belt

(continued on page 58)

H 507th & 513th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENTS; GERMANY, MARCH 24, 1945

The 17th Abn Div conducted its only combat jump – and the last major jump of the war – to support the assault across the Rhine.

(1) & (2) Medical aidman and casualty Paratroopers were often scattered, so medical treatment was sporadic. Battalions established an aid station manned by a surgeon, a medical administrative officer, and six NCO and enlisted medical and surgical technicians. There was also a litter- (stretcher-) bearer squad, and a company aid squad from which medical aidmen were attached to the rifle companies, and jumped in with them. Airborne aidmen seldom displayed red crosses on white discs on their helmets – camouflage was more important – but they did use Geneva Cross armbands. “On paper” aidmen were unarmed, but some carried pistols or carbines. Litter-bearers carried the casualties to the aid station, where they were sorted into wound categories (the process today called triage); they were given minimal treatment, to stabilize them for evacuation to the regimental aid station. This casualty is receiving a plasma drip, with the bottle’s fabric strapping hooked over the sling swivel of a Garand.

(3) Parachute units were provided folding litters, at first with wooden poles as here, and later with aluminum.

(4), (5) & (6) Aidmen originally carried their supplies in musette bags marked with the red cross or in rigger-made containers of various designs, but in mid-1944 they received this parachute medical pouch. It had three compartments; the smaller side ones could be folded inwards over the central one, and the deep flap covered the whole. It could be worn on the upper chest above the reserve parachute when jumping, and on the back when on the ground. It held field dressings, gauze pads and rolls, iodine swabs, adhesive tape, triangular bandages, tourniquets, bandage scissors, sulfa tablets, ammonia inhalants, morphine syrettes, a burn injury and an eye injury set, various pills, and a book of emergency medical tags. Note the typical scatter of discarded trash around the aidman – swabs, dressings, empty packets, and plasma-bottle packing cans.

(7) & (8) Pocket patches, 507th & 513th PIR respectively.

(9) The 17th Abn Div’s rigger-made 10in canvas extension to the Griswold container to allow an M1 Garand to be carried fully assembled; this modification was generally unsatisfactory.



pistol magazine pocket w/2x 7-rd mags	left side of belt
ammunition carrying bag	right side
Griswold weapon container	right side
M1936 "musette" field bag	below reserve parachute
M1942 first aid pouch w/field dressing	left front of belt
sulfa tablets & powder	jacket pocket
parachute first aid packet	front of helmet
M1910 canteen, cup, & cover	right rear of belt
M1943 entrenching tool & carrier	left side of belt
TL-122B flashlight	trousers pocket
M1942 bayonet & M3 scabbard	left side of belt
M3 trench knife & M6 scabbard	right ankle
M2 switchblade pocketknife	jacket pocket
M5-11-7 assault gas mask & M7 case	below reserve behind musette bag
2x gas detection brassards	1 on left shoulder, 1 in gas mask case
33ft parachutist rope	left side of belt
unlined horsehide gloves	on hands
raincoat	musette bag
3x pairs wool socks	musette bag
spare underwear	musette bag
Type B-4 pneumatic life vest	on person – over chest
M1940 identification tags	on person – around neck
M1926 spoon	musette bag
3x K-ration meals	2 in musette bag, 1 in trousers pocket
2x D-ration bars	trousers pockets
2x heat tablets	musette bag
3x packs cigarettes	musette bag & jacket pocket
toilet kit	musette bag
halazone water purification tablets	musette bag
insect repellent	musette bag
motion sickness preventive	jacket pocket
2x shell dressings	trousers pockets
Zippo lighter	trousers pocket
wristwatch	on left wrist
wrist compass	jacket pocket
waterproof matchbox	musette bag
rifle cleaning brush	musette bag
rifle bore cleaner	musette bag
rifle oil	musette bag
4x handkerchiefs	2 in trousers pocket, 2 in musette bag
Normandy map	trousers pocket
"cricket" clicker	trousers pocket
T-5 troop main parachute & harness	back
T-5 troop reserve parachute	chest

Note: This particular paratrooper went into combat with 21 rounds for his pistol and 136 rounds for his M1 rifle (16 clips in pouches and one more in his pocket, to load into his rifle after landing). He was taught to recover ammunition and grenades automatically from casualties.

Parachutists' weapons and ammunition containers

Reference books abound with descriptions of standard field equipment, but paratroopers' specialized equipment is seldom discussed in detail.

The **M1 carbine canvas case**, aka "**carbine holster**," was designed to hold an M1A1 carbine with the stock folded and a magazine inserted; despite its "M1" designation, it was too short for the wooden-stocked M1 carbine. The case was

padded with hair felt and the top end was closed by a flap with two fasteners. A wide canvas loop was sewn to the upper rear side to attach to the pistol belt; a long buckled strap was attached to the tapered lower end for fastening to the leg when jumping. (This was not normally done, as it could cause leg injuries upon landing, and the strap was often cut off.) The case was intended as a means of carrying the carbine once on the ground, but it was sometimes discarded after the jump.

The **M1A1 carbine scabbard** was secured at the top opening by a flap with two LTD fasteners and a strap. There was a leather-reinforced grommet near the top for the operating handle to protrude. There was a loop on the back of the upper end for attaching to the pistol belt or parachute harness, and a small loop on the lower end for a leg strap. This type appears to have been little used.

The **parachutist's submachine-gun holster assembly** was the case to hold the Thompson M1928A1, M1 and M1A1, and the later M3 ("grease gun") SMGs; alternatively it could accommodate an M1A1 carbine. The container was constructed of canvas padded with hair felt, and had a V-ring and snaphook on the back to attach it to the parachute harness.

A triangular canvas piece on the end opening held the case closed, by a locking pin (attached by a cord) threaded through two cloth loops protruding through two grommets and covered by a protective flap.

The **parachutist's rifle holster assembly** was better known as the Griswold container, weapon container, or "violin case." A canvas case heavily padded with hair felt or jute, this rectangular container was designed by Maj George A. Griswold of the 501st PIR. A disassembled M1 rifle (barrel and receiver group, stock group, firing mechanism) was held in the case, and a trained man could reassemble it in a matter of seconds. The first model was closed by five cone-and-grommet fasteners – as used on parachute pack opening systems – along one side, a leather lace or rifle cleaning rod being threaded through holes in the cones; a flap with five snaps then covered the closure. This method was time-consuming to open; the second model replaced the cones-and-grommets with a heavy-duty zipper, but retained the five-snap flap. The first model had two long tie-tapes on the back to fasten it to the parachute harness, the second a V-ring and snaphook. Thompson M1/M1A1 SMGs could fit inside tightly, but not the M1928A1; in 1944 some Griswolds were modified by the addition of a small 5in pocket on the lower end to accommodate the muzzle compensator of an M1928A1. In early 1945, 17th Abn Div riggers modified Griswolds by adding a 10in canvas extension to the bag's lower end allowing an assembled M1 rifle to be carried.

Rectangular pouches with a fastener-secured flap and a belt loop on the back were known as "Air Corps pouches"; this **rifle clip holder** held



101st Abn Div bazooka gunner posing in the door of a C-47. Initially it was thought that the M1A1 bazooka could be dropped only in a separate container, but paratroopers quickly came up with methods allowing them to jump with the bazooka attached. Here canvas covers protect the muzzle and breech, and the sling is over his left shoulder; the weapon must also be attached to his kit at waist level. An M3 knife is strapped to his left leg; while wearing knives on legs or ankles was a common practice, it could lead to landing injuries – and the knife also tended to snag when the soldier was pushing his way through vegetation. Note that he has a pack of Camel cigarettes taped to his left cuff for easy access during the flight; before he jumps he will transfer his smokes to a pocket. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)

Jumpers about to exit a Douglas C-47 Skytrain ("Dakota") by night; they normally cleared the door at a rate of one man per second, if not quicker. The B-4 "Mae West" is worn over the web gear but under the T-5 parachute harness; a man who landed in water first had to get out of his harness before he could inflate the life vest, or it would crush his chest (and significant numbers of men drowned before they could accomplish this). Note that the second man has a case for 30-rd SMG magazines at his left hip; this could also accommodate three rifle grenades (though the top could not then be fastened), or three 37mm M4 ground signal-projector flares. (Tom Laemlein/*Armor Plate Press*)



four 8-rd clips for the M1 rifle, two 15-rd M1A1 carbine magazines plus a 50-rd carton, or seven 5-rd stripper clips for the M1903 rifle. It was fitted to M1936 pistol belts, typically two, four, or six per man. The deeper **submachine-gun clip holder** (though SMG magazines are not properly called "clips") held four 20-rd Thompson magazines.

The **M6 parachutist rocket carrying bag** was identical to the standard bag, but with the addition of a large snap hook on the upper rear allowing it to be attached to the parachute harness, and at the bottom rear two web tie-tapes attached to D-rings so it could be secured to the leg with a quick-release bow knot. The flap of this flat, deep bag closed by one or two snaps, and it had a shoulder sling and a carrying handle. It was made to hold three 2.36in rockets, though a fourth could be stuffed in. Two or three bags were issued per bazooka.

The **M1944 leg bag** was produced under contract in Britain and known as the "British leg bag" or "drop bag." It was used to jump ammunition (including small arms, MG, mortar, bazooka), hand and rifle grenades, demolitions, mines, communications equipment, medical supplies, and other gear. The 14in diameter, 30in deep bag was made of heavy canvas, with hair felt padding in the bottom and a top opening held closed by a snap-link (carabineer). On one side a vertical slit opening down the whole length allowed easy packing and rapid removal of the contents; this was closed by cord X-laced through 12 grommets. On another side was a long canvas pocket for the 20ft lowering rope; one end of this was secured to the parachute harness and the other to the snap-link clipped to two D-rings at the bag's mouth. Behind the bag were two quick-release straps to be fastened loosely around the right leg. After the canopy opened the leg straps were released, a cotter pin was pulled, and the bag was slowly lowered on the rope by hand. This allowed the load (of up to 80lb) to land before the jumper, avoiding the injury that would be inevitable if he hit the DZ with such a heavy load strapped to him. In Normandy many paratroopers lost their leg bags by dropping them freely rather than lowering them hand-over-hand; the shock either tore the bag loose from the rope, or ripped the bottom seams out of it, spilling the contents.

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Unlike the more widely used C-47, the Curtiss C-46 Commando transport – first used for combat jumps in the Rhine assault of March 24, 1945 – had troop doors on both sides, thus speeding up the jump. These paratroopers preparing to exit a C-46 are identifiable as from 17th Abn Div by their Griswold containers with a 10in extension for fully assembled rifles (see Plate H9). Being unpadded, the extension did not protect the muzzle and front sight from impact, and in the event of an unstable, tumbling exit it might snag the deploying canopy suspension lines. Note too that both the men standing in the doors have British M1944 leg bags (see Plate G7), and the man on the right has "add-on" cargo pockets on the thighs of his M1943 trousers. (Tom Laemlein/Armor Plate Press)



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OPPOSITE

A paratrooper's equipment displayed on a shelter-half. *Top to bottom, left to right:*

T-5 main parachute; AL-140 ground/air marker panel (12ft x 30.5in) with wire stakes; T-5 reserve parachute.

.30cal M1 rifle with M1907 sling. Griswold rifle container; M1905 bayonet; SCR-536 "handie-talkie" radio with rigger-made carrier; mosquito head-net; horsehide gloves.

33ft lowering rope; two 30-rd SMG magazine carriers, but with 3x 37mm M4 ground signal-projector flares; M1936 pistol belt with suspenders; M1918 pistol magazine pockets (2x 7-rd); five rigger-made M1 rifle clip pockets each taking 5 clips (= 200 rds); M1942 18in machete; M1910 1-quart canteen with cover; M1924 first aid pouch with field dressing and sulfa powder; M1916 holster with .45cal M1911A1 pistol; M1918 Mk I trench knife; M1938 lensatic compass with M19 case; TL-122A flashlight; notepads, 2 pencils, M2 paratrooper's pocket switchblade knife, waterproof match case; 6x D-ration bars; field dressing; foot powder can; 3x pill bottles (atabrine, halazone, aspirin); toothbrush, M1926 spoon; 4x Mk II fragmentation grenades. (US Army)

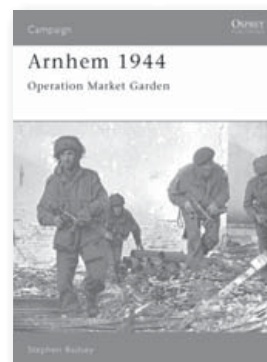
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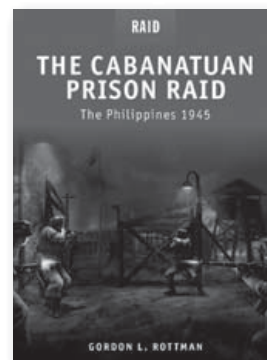
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Abbreviations used in this text:

Abn	Airborne
Bn	Battalion
CO	Commanding officer
Co	Company
Div	Division
DZ	Drop zone
Engr	Engineer
FATF	First Airborne Task Force
GFAB	Glider Field Artillery Battalion
GIR	Glider Infantry Regiment
HHC	Headquarters and Headquarters Company
HQ	Headquarters
Inf	Infantry

LMG	Light machine gun
NCO	Noncommissioned officer
PFAB	Parachute Field Artillery Battalion
PIB	Parachute Infantry Battalion
PIR	Parachute Infantry Regiment
Plat	Platoon
Prcht	Parachute
PRCT	Parachute Regimental Combat Team
Prov	Provisional
PUC	Presidential Unit Citation
Regt	Regiment
SMG	Submachine gun
T/O&E	Table of Organization and Equipment
XO	Executive officer (2nd in command)